

Contents

Introduction	1
The partners' roles	4
Peer educator training: Albena, Bulgaria, July 2010	7
Sample partner feedback by workshop: Athens, March 2010	13
Strengths of the project	15
Impact of the project	22
Training the trainers: Nicosia, Cyprus, November 2010	31
Issues for further reflection	32
Accreditation	37
Conclusions	38
Sources	40



“As citizens we all have an obligation to intervene and become involved. It’s the citizen that changes things. I can’t imagine myself outside any kind of social or political involvement.”

Jose Saramago, winner of the Nobel Prize

“Nothing About Us Without Us.”

UN Chronicle, International Day of Disabled Persons, 2004

“We all laugh together even if we do not speak the same language.”

Peer educator, Bulgaria, 2010

Introduction

Peer Education – Pan European (PEPE) is a Lifelong Learning, Transfer of Innovation Leonardo da Vinci-funded project. The lead partner is Gower College Swansea (formerly Gorseinon College) in Wales, UK. Other partners include those from Bulgaria (MCA — Marie Curie Association), Cyprus (Synthesis Center for Research and Education Ltd), Denmark (Kold College), Greece (Asset Technology Ltd), Italy (CSCS — Centro Studi ‘Cultura Sviluppo’) and Portugal (FMH — Faculdade de Motricidade Humana, Technical University of Lisbon). These partners are a mixture of public, non-governmental and private sector organisations.

The PEPE project derives from the Peer Implementation Project (PIP, 2007–2009) which in turn implemented the original Peer Education training programme developed through the Leonardo Me Myself I (MMI, 2005–2007) project.

The central aim of PEPE, as defined by the project application, has been to develop and transfer the successful Peer Education Training Programme to new partner countries and to groups of people who are in various ways disengaged from mainstream opportunities.

New partners include organisations from differing vocational education environments and those who support people experiencing a range of physical, sensory or learning disabilities.

The external evaluation process has been founded on the principle of becoming a ‘critical friend’ to the partners. This has involved a significant element of participant observation including experiencing both training courses as a learner.

The wish expressed by the partnership was to be provided with ongoing advice and support during the life of the project. The evaluator has, in particular, maintained a close contact with the lead partner and internal evaluator and engaged with the project via a process of observation, interview and feedback from partners, participants and third parties.

I have written an interim evaluation and have attended every transnational meeting and provided informal and formal feedback on each occasion as part of the evaluation work package.

The Executive Summary has already been circulated and translated into all the partner languages. This final evaluation is written in English only for presentation to the partners at the final meeting in Pistoia in September 2011 and will then be published for wider circulation.

The partners identified a number of key issues that they wished to have examined throughout the course of the project:

- The effectiveness and added value of transnational working.
- The extent to which PEPE could build on the outcomes of the PIP project and previous projects in terms of flexibility and the transferability of the training programme.
- The impact of the project on stakeholders, accreditation organisations, vocational, educational and training (VET) systems and employers as well as on the partners, peer educators and target groups of the project.
- The quality and ease of use of the final products and their appropriateness for the target groups.
- The quality and potential for commercial exploitation of the products of the project, and the quality, appropriateness and success of the dissemination and marketing activities.

The success of most of these aims became apparent during the course of the project.

Those relating to the final impact of the project and in particular the ease of use of the final products and the possibilities of its commercial exploitation will remain only partly tested at the conclusion of the project in September 2011. Partners will need to monitor these issues in the post-project phase as they roll out the training to wider audiences.

A key focus of the evaluation is an assessment of the benefits of the project as perceived by the primary users and beneficiaries. As in so many projects this criterion is amongst the most important, if not the most important, aspect of the partners' work.

The majority of the information has been gathered through a variety of means including individual interviews, focus groups, questionnaires and feedback sheets. Wherever possible these have been conducted face to face.

Many of these activities and focus groups took place at the extended residential programmes in Bulgaria and Cyprus in 2010 when the peer educator training and trainers' training courses were respectively delivered.

The internal evaluator has carefully collated all the feedback from the participants and summarised it graphically in his reports to the partners.



The partners' roles

All the partners within the project were allocated distinct responsibilities and each one of them had the task of leading an element of the project as defined within the work packages.

The partners have supported each other effectively as deputies for work packages and each one has been expected to provide a representative for each work package meeting. This effectively meant that if this model was to work effectively two representatives from all the partners were required to make arrangements to attend each meeting.

Some of the issues covered in the first interviews have included partners' general expectations, the value of the project to each respective organisation, the progress with dissemination, emerging issues, and their plans for the exploitation of the project. They were also questioned about the value of European co-operation in maximising the project's success.

Extracts from selected partner and contractor interviews at the transnational meeting in Athens, March 2010

Bulgarian partners: Mariya and Petia (Marie Curie Association)

The Bulgarian partners were new to the concept of peer education but not to the practice of mentoring. Their greatest hope was that their experience and that of the other partners, and Gower College in particular, would complement their own understanding and would lead to genuinely innovative work.

Mariya and Petia felt that participation had been properly encouraged and that the partners had been put at their ease. They also considered that there had been active listening and discussion and useful and effective solutions had emerged to the issues being discussed.

Although acknowledging that the project was ambitious in its goals, Mariya and Petia thought that the targets were feasible and realistic and that a solid basis for progress had been established.

They said, "We have reached the top of the mountain and hopefully progress will be like travelling downhill from this point."

They felt it important, as the partnership had agreed, that there was clarification of roles and that these should be maintained.

Their earnest hope was that the outcomes of the project could be properly embedded within the mainstream organisations represented in the partnership.

Marie Curie were running a very successful 'Big Brother/Big Sister' programme, which they were sure could be enhanced and complemented by the products and instruments that would emerge from PEPE.

Mariya and Petia both considered that the project would be more coherent if all the partners met in plenary sessions for all the work packages. They would be putting their proposals to the partnership at the end of the meeting. They understood the arguments for organising the conferences in the present format but were still convinced that plenary meetings would be more effective.

On a personal note, Petia, who experiences visual impairment, wanted to say that she was grateful for having been shown consideration and support by all the partners during the course of the conference.

UK web and media contractor Adastra Cymru (interviewed in Athens in March 2010 and by telephone in the UK in May 2011)

Managing Director, David Townsend Jones

David was satisfied that all the tasks listed in his contract together with subsequent requests from partners were achievable and his company was on schedule to deliver them. Emerging issues and requests for changes and modifications to the site and the related services, raised by the partners, had all been incorporated.

The key issues discussed included maximising user control and accessibility and the encouragement of greater use of the web-based communication platforms developed by Adastra Cymru for PEPE. The former was being facilitated by Adastra but the latter was in the hands of the partners!

David considered that this was a mature and experienced partnership with ambitious but achievable goals and that the understanding of the subject by the partners was impressive. He felt the project partners had demonstrated a good understanding of the Moodle 'virtual learning environment', which powers the partner extranet, and how its effective use could provide a pivotal function in

delivering the goals that they were all seeking. He was also pleased with the responses of the partners to the earlier plans for the website, which has been built on the Joomla content management system. He felt the partners had demonstrated a sophisticated understanding of the web-based tools being used.

Peer educator training: Albena, Bulgaria, July 2010

The peer educator training in Bulgaria and the subsequent trainer training in Cyprus were the focal points of the project. A good deal of the work of the project has led to the preparation and delivery of these training courses.

It is a complex task to plan an integrated, coherent and stimulating course with contributions from seven partner countries connected through the web and bilateral conversations. The use of Skype has been limited because it is not considered sufficiently secure for use in public sector organisations in the UK. Overall, nevertheless, despite these constraints during the planning phase, the training was very successful.

A high level of satisfaction was expressed by the trainers and the participants. Enough critical feedback was obtained to enable improvements to be made, and this provided an opportunity for the partners to customise the training for their own audiences.

For both the trainers' and participants' feedback, see **Tables 1** and **2** on the following page. Note that not all partners answered every question.

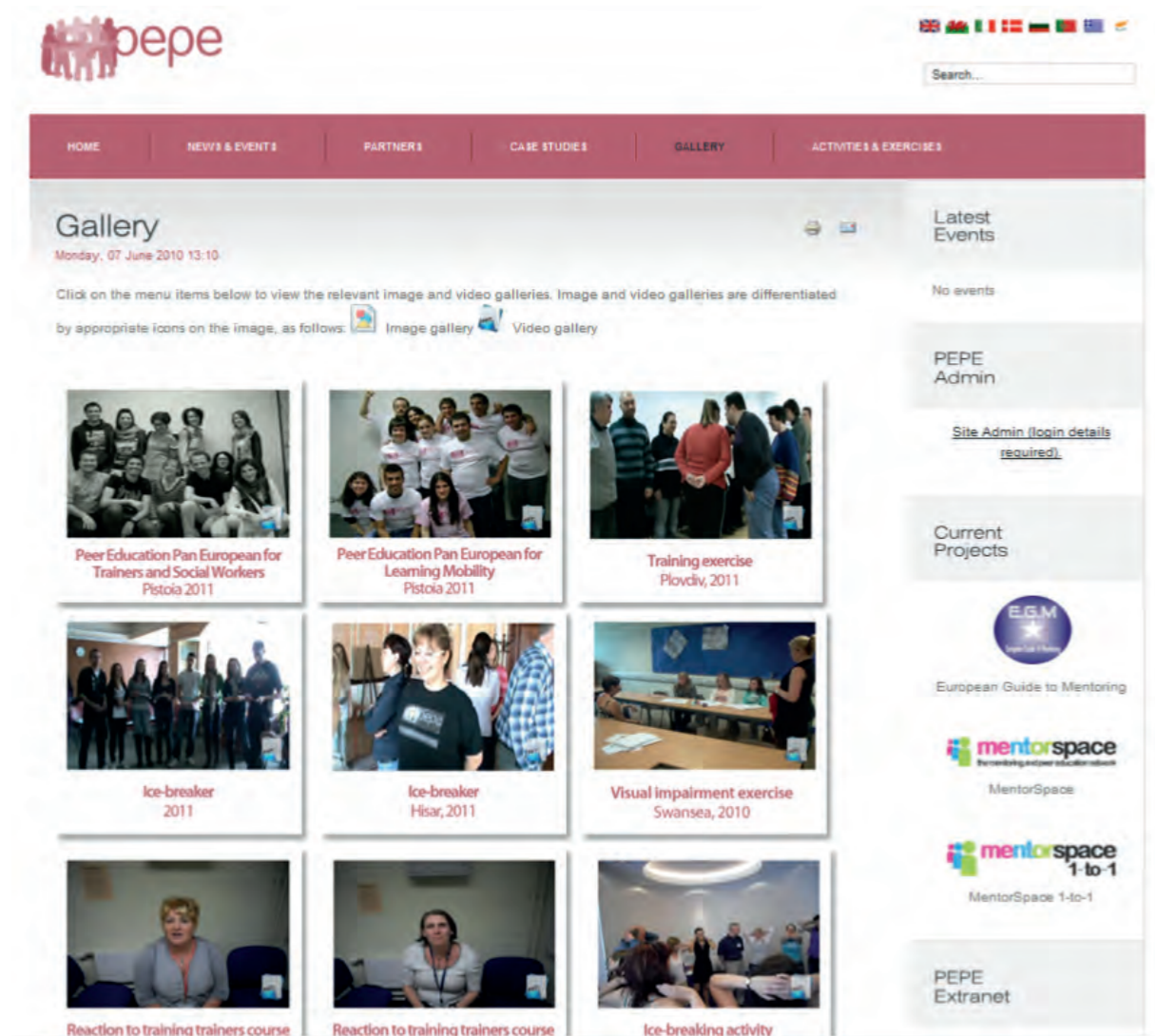


Table 1. Evaluation of the training course by trainers

	Excellent	Very good	Satisfactory	Unsatisfactory
How would you evaluate the quality of the training programme?	2	3	1	
Were your main expectations met?	2	4		
How would you rate the learning methods used?	3	2	1	
How would you rate the learning achieved by peer educators?	2	3	1	
How would you rate the communication between trainers and peer educators?	3	2		
How would you rate the venue?	1		3	

Table 2. Evaluation of training modules by peer educators

	Excellent	Very good	Satisfactory	Unsatisfactory
How would you evaluate the quality of the session overall?	20	42	16	1
Were your main expectations met?	20	46	12	1
How would you rate the training methods used?	31	28	17	3

“What did you enjoy most about the experience and which elements of the training are you most likely to use?”

“I think the energizers are the things I will use most.”

“The games, because they make you laugh.”

“The exercises mostly.”

“The ice-breakers and energizers mostly, especially those referring to names, and the physical contact.”

“The ice-breakers are really useful when peer educating. It was also good to hear about all the other partners.”

“Pretty much everything.”

“The energizers and ice-breakers. I loved the time that everyone took part in the session.”

“The ice-breakers and energizers. They were really innovative and useful.”

“The ice-breaking and energizing activities. I also felt that all the activities brought me closer to other members of the group.”

“I could use them all.”

“Some of the games maybe.”

“The exercises for presentation skills and [what] is the experience of being disabled in any way.”

“Trust-building exercises.”

“Different hats for different opinions.”

“Self-esteem and confidence boosters, body language and non-verbal exercises.”

“Working together in groups.”

“The game which Leonardo suggested, where we had to find out how to work in a team. It was the best game I have ever played.”

“Presentation skills.”

“Stress management.”

“Simulate someone with learning difficulty.”

“Disability awareness for hearing impaired and visually impaired.”

“It is very clever to put ourselves on purpose in the position of annoying people in a conversation. Most of the time we are annoying without understanding why!”

“I liked the activities about disabilities because I felt that I know how the person with disabilities felt in everyday life.”

“The activity in which we should count to 20 not speaking simultaneously is very useful because it causes many different feelings. We all laugh together even if we do not speak the same language.”

“Group activities and stress management.”

“Working in groups. I liked the one with famous personalities and their qualities.”

“Role-playing activities can be applied to several different target groups.”

Some more comments:

“What problems emerged during the training?”

“The interruptions of the mentor were a bit irritating.”

“I didn’t always understand the activity. I get the impression that the language is a big disadvantage for us.”

“The trainer led the session all day and didn’t stop to interrupt us. I want to add that the trainer insisted that we were not English-speakers and gave the stage to the people with better English.”

“The bad acoustics meant it was very hard to listen.”

“It would have been good to have computers during the session with David so we could practise ourselves.”

“In the presentation, I can’t read if the background is dark.”

It was clear from the marking that more issues had arisen than those captured in the evaluation sheets. Focus groups highlighted punctuality, difficulty with concentration and a need for more breaks.

In some cases the relevance of the training was cited as a difficulty, especially for those who did not feel their future would be immediately linked to this work.

The assessment of the training programme by peer educators has been represented as a total by merging the days and sessions. This has been done partly because the evaluations for the sessions were incomplete and consequently the breakdown by day did not supply statistically significant data.

The number of questions not answered was also significant and partners might consider how to ensure that the evaluations and comments of participants were as complete as possible. Providing examples of what trainers are looking to receive might help.

The disadvantage of not offering this form of direct support is an increase in the likelihood of receiving bland answers. (The most common answer to “Any other comments?” was either blank [75%] or a comment generally thanking the organizers.)

Between 75% and 80% of peer educators thought the training programme was excellent or very good, and over 97% believed it to be at least satisfactory. The first figure is more significant because polling research suggests that participants completing a poll with four options tend to assume that the third or fourth options are generally critical however they might be designated.

Two peer educators raised issues related to the training environment, auditory and visual elements of the presentations, levels of understanding by non-native speakers, and tiredness:

“I think the group is strong and productive. It wasn’t an exhausting day.”

“We miss the midday sun. We would like to take a break during the day.”

“I liked the intellectual ice-breakers. We had to be creative and sharp-minded.”

“Bigger breaks after lunch.”

“Too little time.”

Energizer exercises and ice-breakers, not surprisingly, seemed to be universally popular. They were most cited as exercises that peer educators would be most likely to include in adapted programmes for their own use. The second most likely elements to be taken back to use in locally delivered courses were the activity exercises.

Perhaps not surprisingly, participants were not, at least at this stage, looking to adapt any of the trainer presentations or lessons but were instead concentrating on activities and exercises.

Nevertheless it was suggested that it would be helpful to offer the peer educators a synopsis or template of the main training elements so that their work will not be entirely activity-based.

Over 80% of the participants did not complete section 7 on the evaluation: “Any other comments?”

This question could have provided much more qualitative feedback for the evaluation. Either it was not fully understood by participants or it was not sufficiently clearly explained.

There is more scope generally for explaining, perhaps with model answers, what the organizers are looking for through open-ended questions.

To ensure a higher rate of completion it might well be practical to collect evaluations at the point of leaving the session where participants can also be encouraged to complete the whole form (and the organizers can be sure that the evaluation is completed.)

This more rigorous approach would provide an informal way of learning for peer educators about how to ensure a full response to training sessions that in future they themselves will be providing.

In response to the question: "Did any problems emerge in any of the sessions?", 6 answered yes and 73 answered no.

This very positive response is heartening and demonstrates a high sense of overall satisfaction with the training.

These responses, however, did not entirely reflect the feedback, with the participants on some of the days offering 48 responses as only satisfactory or unsatisfactory.

This conclusion is based on the interpretation presented earlier that "satisfactory" only implied some concerns or problems. It may be helpful to encourage or require participants to elaborate if they score the programme in this way — or indeed if they score it positively.

It may well be that part of the explanation for the above was politeness, but there is no material evidence to support this conclusion.



Sample partner feedback by workshop: Athens, March 2010

This feedback related to the session in Athens. It was the first to reflect on progress after the first major deliverable of PEPE had been concluded.

The returns for the four workshops assessed were good, but Work Package 2 only produced four evaluations as opposed to ten/eleven for the other workshops.

This was a reminder to partners to be vigilant in collecting feedback forms and ensuring that there were sufficient staff available to cover all the workshop meetings. This was partly explained by a small attendance, which in turn was affected by a shortage of staff in some workshops. Not all reports were available for the interim evaluation.

The following is a synopsis of the main comments from participants.

Work Package 1

The workshop was very well received and professionally conducted.

Positives:

- Clear briefing and well-organised meeting*
- Effective presentation*
- Good partner interaction*
- All essential documents were available*
- Professional, intelligent and inclusive leadership*

Concerns:

- Better environment (especially a second space for parallel meetings)*
- More participants could have been more active*

Aggregate score: 9/10

Work Package 2

Of all the work packages, this workshop came in for most criticism, although in general the scoring was reasonable. Nevertheless it was deemed to be helpful by partners and clarified some issues.

Concerns:

- Clearer strategy*
- Early provision of documentation*
- Better attendance*
- A proper agenda and some clarification of the distinction between the roles of internal and external evaluator*
- A concern that the internal evaluation strategy could fall behind the agreed timetable*

Aggregate score: 7.8

Work Package 3

Positives:

- Very focused leadership*
- A friendly and cooperative environment*
- Clear plans and everything covered*

Concerns:

- Need to upload all documents a week before the meetings*
- All partners need to attend each workshop*
- Ongoing concern re parallel meetings [from one participant]*
- Not all partners present*

Aggregate score: 9.1

Work Package 4

Positives:

- Totally completed*
- Excellent methods*
- The chair was well prepared*
- Everything that needed to be done has been done*

Concerns:

- More frequent communication would help*
- Too much time spent on small details and insufficient time to ask all my questions*
- Documentation for a meeting like this should be mentioned in the agenda*
- Perhaps sometimes we work too independently*

Average aggregate score: 8

Strengths of the project

Project management

The project leaders, Gower College, have again shown themselves to be highly experienced, focused and effective.

They took an active role in the development and delivery of this project, having been able to count themselves as leading experts in mentoring and peer education in the U.K. They have now acquired a Europe-wide reputation for expertise in mentor training and have previously led, or been prominent in, no less than seven linked Leonardo projects over the last six years.

The partners could take comfort in the knowledge that the lead partner was highly organised in its management of the project and its ability to coordinate the efforts of the partners to satisfy the exacting requirements of the U.K. National Agency.

Gower College in turn reported how much they valued the effective support and encouragement they received from all the partners.

The lead partners have retained and exhibited an enthusiasm for the subject and this has been infectious. Throughout they have been strong champions of the trainees and young people who they understood were and would be the ultimate beneficiaries of PEPE.

Project administration and financial organisation

Project administration and financial control have both been efficient and practical. The service holds the partners' efforts together in a well-organised manner and ensures compliance with key deliverables.

The service has been delivered in a firm but quietly diplomatic fashion and the lead administrator has deftly guided all partners into both general and administrative compliance with the project regime.

Some late financial reports for the interim report in October 2010 caused consternation. A greater sense of contractual responsibility amongst partners at key intervals of the project would have significantly eased the overall administrative burden.

The lead partners' administrator has managed the transnational funds scrupulously, and this has simplified the financial arrangements at transnational meetings. This method allowed for a straightforward administrative approach, which minimised any financial misunderstandings during these key meetings and allowed the partners to concentrate on the main deliverables of the project.

Expertise and synergy

There is evidence of a combination of expertise and synergy within the partnership. Project discussions are both informed and sophisticated.

Feedback from partners suggested mutual respect and confidence and a belief that it is possible to meet and exceed the project's targets and to produce high-quality outcomes (although the definition of what constitutes high-quality outcomes will, of course, differ slightly amongst partners). Whilst there are different opinions and perspectives on the best way to achieve goals, these strongly held beliefs have been funnelled into a genuine consensus.

Communication between partners

This is often one of the most problematic areas in transnational projects. It is especially the case where sophisticated training programmes are being developed remotely, where no face-to-face work is possible between meetings and when planning future activities.

However, use of the website forum has been significantly greater than in previous projects. By using the forum more effectively the partners have been able to develop greater awareness of the activities and progress of others.

The partners have extended the scope for a much wider use of these communication channels, as recommended in the interim report. This has allowed them to make best use of the technology available to them and has diminished the barriers of physical distance, which inevitably restricted the engagement of the partners in between meetings.

Dissemination

The dissemination strategy is sophisticated, comprehensive and well developed and its completion is critical to the success of the project.

Led by the Italian partner CSCS, who have wide experience and an impressive network for dissemination, PEPE has been able to permeate a wide range of organisations both through the participants' existing networks and new networks developed as a result of the project's activities.

The format was standardized, with clear, unambiguous targets. For each partner a minimum of ten websites were to be accessed and five newsletters and five networks joined, in addition to participating in conferences and giving talks. The specific nature of these targets was helpful, for the process of dissemination can be difficult to identify and measure both quantitatively and qualitatively.

Dissemination activity for PEPE has been impactful and highly varied. Some partners have found their target easy to achieve and have exceeded it, whilst others have found it more challenging.

Asset Technology, the Greek partner, who hosted the Athens meeting, are themselves experienced in project management and have striven to share linked projects and identify synergies between them. Asset Tec provided a joint project meeting on the evening before the Athens conference for linked projects to provide outline presentations and make connections between related activities.

Taking such informal opportunities to share linked ideas and best dissemination practice within work package meetings proved to be a valuable exercise and was well received by all the partners who were able to attend. This experiment may provide a useful precedent for future projects.

CSCS too have made links with a wide network of organisations over the years, which is both extensive and comprehensive and has been customised to the needs of this project.

The PEPE approach to dissemination has ensured that organisations with a potential interest in this work are made aware of the outcomes as soon as they are completed. In this way they can pilot the activities, wherever possible, before the conclusion of the project.

CSCS understand the importance of visibility and have promoted PEPE and its products nationally through their marketing, dissemination and promotional activities. This has ensured that they have key positioning in Italy and a raised profile in the field of peer education and mentoring.

They have provided important advice to other partners and have taken active steps to assist and advise them in how to achieve similar results. For example,

with the assistance of CSCS, individual web pages for activities are now accessible to non-PEPE (i.e., external) users.

Within CSCS's own activities there has been significant implementation and integration of peer education. This relates both to learning mobility initiatives focused on VET students and to young people with physical or mental disabilities.

CSCS have invested significant amounts of their own resources in trying to raise the profile of and interest in peer education across Italy, through their awareness-raising activities and mailings.

Those who have registered for the pilot course for trainers in Italy represent the first tangible and positive outcome of these activities. The pilot course will see the participation of professionals from different contexts:

- Regions (i.e., southern Italy / northern Italy)
- Fields (young people / with disabilities / with physical impairments)
- Types of organisations (public bodies / private companies / non-profit organisations)

CSCS have uploaded a number of useful training videos on the PEPE website to interest prospective users.

They are the Italian representatives in EfVET and this important link is taking the contribution of the PEPE project directly to an E.U. audience.

CSCS's co-ordination of both local and national strategies has been a key element of the PEPE project. Their experience in this area has also provided less experienced partners with ideas and an understanding of what works in producing strategies to meet their own national training environment.

The CSCS model of engagement, along with that of the project leader, Gower College, is the most comprehensive of all the partners and is a strategy that one hopes can be emulated by the rest of the partners in the future.

Peer educator training in Bulgaria

The previous PIP training, which took place in 2008 with many beneficiaries attending for an extended period in Turkey, emerged as the highlight of that particular project and was highly valued by the great majority of the trainees.

In focus groups a number of them described the experience as profound and for some it was very evidently life-changing.

The peer educator training in Bulgaria followed a similar model and again was highly effective. The feedback from participants, as described earlier in this report, was extremely positive.

The programme was a good mix of activity-based learning and theoretical teaching, matching the maturity of the participants. It also complemented the transnational environment in which 'learning by doing' works especially well.

Concerns that the programme might struggle to accommodate the very wide cultural and ability range of young people proved generally to be unfounded. Some less positive comments tended to come from the Portuguese university-level students who may have found some of the exercises insufficiently challenging, and from the Danish participants who could not always see the immediate relevance of the work within their own vocational context.

However, the feedback from the young people, partners and trainers was generally very positive and the mixture of age levels and abilities did not interfere with the success of the training.

A spin-off benefit was the support that more advanced students were able to provide to younger and less experienced participants, which, of course, is in the best traditions of peer mentoring.

Training materials

A number of the partners have already produced training materials of very high quality in the field of mentoring. These materials are now in active use and have been disseminated to colleges and training organisations in the U.K.

Gower College in particular has an excellent reputation for the training materials they previously developed for PIP, and PEPE has provided an opportunity to further develop and refine these products, both in printed and CD-based form.

The training packages for both courses have been completed and successfully piloted within the project nationally, with some customisation where required. In printed format they have been produced as sets of loose-leaf A4 cards and packaged as a pair of products in attractive folders.

The commercial agreements and protocols have been completed and were confirmed at the Danish meeting. All partners are free to exploit and disseminate the materials developed through the work of PEPE within their own countries and also in other countries with the permission of a number of the other partners.

Strong beneficiary engagement

Partners were clear about the importance of enhancing the training with the active engagement of the users and obtaining feedback from them in order to enhance the quality of the course.

The external evaluator received valuable feedback from the focus groups and individual interviews at the meetings in Bulgaria and Cyprus where the two courses were piloted.

One particular initiative introduced by FMH, the Portuguese partner, was 'Eyes and Ears'. Daily during the course two participants volunteered to be the 'Eyes and Ears' for the day. Their job was to obtain feedback, feelings and responses from as many of the participants as they could manage during the 24 hours in which they occupied the role.

Peer educators' opinions and suggestions were collected and the 'Eyes and Ears' participants shared their findings with the full group the following morning.

All the 'Eyes and Ears' volunteers took their work extremely seriously, in some cases working late into the night to capture the responses of all or nearly all the participants that day and prepare a presentation to everyone for the first session of the following day.

It was notable that in most cases the quality and honesty of the feedback exceeded that collected via formal evaluation methods.

This service provided the training programme with high-quality instant responses to the work being undertaken and allowed for modifications to be made in the course of the event itself.

For example, concerns that the programme was becoming too tiring for those with limited English brought about a modification of the programme and an extension of the breaks to ensure that the training did not become over-exhausting.

Through this process it emerged that the whole training programme was proving too physically, emotionally and intellectually challenging for some and that the providers needed to ensure that these problems were resolved.

This 'real time' feedback from participants was very useful, since it formed the first presentation every day. It would, in my view, be highly effective in any similar programme or project.

This piece of good practice introduced by the Portuguese partners also impressed other partners who independently made a note to incorporate it into similar training programmes in the future.

Most importantly it used the peer educator model of working empathetically with peers to obtain responses that may not have been shared so readily with professional trainers and course organisers.



Impact of the project

Following the success of the pilots, the training has been successfully rolled out in some partner countries.

In Bulgaria, for example, peer educator courses led by trained trainers have been run by MCA. The courses were customized to the needs of the participants and the feedback received so far has been very positive.

In Italy, CSCS have reported an improvement in the effectiveness of their operations in the field of learning mobility. They are currently testing the procedures. What is emerging there is that peer education can contribute significantly to their performance.

CSCS anticipate enhanced success rates with their learning mobility initiatives, an improvement in the retention of participants and a reduced drop-out rate.

In Cyprus, Synthesis are targeting refugees and the hearing impaired and courses held to date there have been well received. Their plan to use these trainers, who are often opinion-formers within their communities, is an imaginative way of enhancing the impact the training will have upon these target groups.

Gower College have continued their highly successful work with the new challenge of embedding the training within the recently merged college and continuing to broaden their influence across Wales and the U.K.

'Eyes and Ears' example: Bulgaria

Rehe and Noal conducted an 'Eyes and Ears' exercise during the course of the training programme in Bulgaria. They were enthusiastic about the task and were thorough in getting to talk to almost every peer educator. The task began at the end of the day and was conducted during the evening and the following morning and in their case late into the night.

The key feedback points were:

"There is too much to fit in."

"We need more time off to keep up concentration."

"Handouts were helpful."

"Being creative [in] every session was tiring."

"Communication and presentation [are] very important."

"We need to practise and gain more academic skills."

"Trainers need to be more empathetic."

The following day the 'Eyes and Ears' representative, Michael, from Greece received similar valuable feedback:

"The role plays are not always clearly presented."

"Some of us are tired [as a result of] the practical activities."

A peer educator was offended by being told to speak more clearly when English was not her first language.

"The course was a great chance to be creative."

The comments were presented anonymously and were especially accurate and heartfelt because they were provided to other peer educators.

When 'Eyes and Ears' workers were interviewed they were convinced that participants had been more frank with them than they would have been with an attributed feedback form. This 'real time' feedback allowed all the trainers and participants to modify their contribution immediately.

Marketing

The marketing materials produced to support the dissemination process have been designed to be bright and impactful. These materials have been successfully produced in recent projects and partners are building on the evident success of those products.

Partners experienced in providing marketing materials have again settled upon a brand and logo, designed by Adastra Cymru, which will provide the project with a strong identity and offer marketing products that will be valued and used by participants.

Partners have a good feel for marketing materials that are good value and what the target market is for them.

The marketing products appear fresh and innovative and will support the key strategies of the overall project when they are properly targeted.

The products were made available by the time of the transnational meeting in Cyprus and have been put into use early in the life of the project.

The partners have set up a successful promotional strategy to underpin this work and commissioned brochures, posters and T-shirts to disseminate the brand of PEPE to a wider audience at future networking events.

PEPE online

Web and media contractors Adastra Cymru have provided the same high-quality and responsive online support they delivered on previous projects and have been able to build on previous work. This added value has offered the partnership greater value for money than would normally have been possible within the limited budget available.

The contractors have successfully incorporated the requests made by the partners and dealt with all their concerns and questions in a systematic way. Adastra's responsiveness and expertise has led to a customised and useable suite of web-based, digital and printed training, dissemination and marketing tools.

The use by partners of both the Joomla public website and the private Moodle extranet, and especially the extranet forum, has broadened considerably,

although it has also been acknowledged that still more extensive use by the partners would provide additional benefit to the overall outcomes.

During the course of the project the public website has been extensively revised, mostly in response to partner requests. As a result it is now more accessible and navigable as well as being brighter and more attractive to use. The first three months of 2011 saw an average of approximately 1,300 visits to the PEPE website per month and the level of interest continues to grow.

It must be noted that CSCS have made a significant contribution to the development of the strategy for the PEPE website. Their observation was that both websites (the Moodle communication platform as well as the Joomla 'front end') are of good quality and provide effective tools for interaction both among partners and the wider community for promotional purposes.

The mechanism by which these sites will be sustained has not yet been finalised but it seems likely that Gower College will take over the role of hosting them.

MentorSpace

This dedicated communication platform for the European peer educator community, together with its secure '1-to-1' derivative for private mentor/mentee interaction, were originally developed by Adastra as products of the NetMentor project, one of those that preceded PEPE.

They were refined during the course of NetMentor and have been further improved and expanded and added to the products of this project, with significant input from Greek partners Asset Tec.

The two platforms, MentorSpace and 1-to-1, allow trainers, peer educators, mentors and mentees to communicate freely, easily and safely and at no cost with each other and with those whom they are supporting. They are excellent examples of a follow-up project fully utilizing and adding value to the products of an earlier project.

Presentations of both systems delivered in Cyprus were well received by PEPE trainers who could immediately identify the benefits for beneficiaries.

Both MentorSpace and 1-to-1 have important potential for future contact between mentors or mentees after they have left their institution, complementing other methods of communication.

Peer Educator Training Course

The peer educator training in Bulgaria was led by the Portuguese partners FMH. The course was thoroughly prepared and consultation was extensive.

The training was adjudged by the partners to be very successful, in view of the constraints within which it was developed. A risk was identified that the course might be somewhat disjointed due to the challenges experienced during the course planning, but this proved to be barely evident.

Feedback and suggestions were provided from all the partners, with web traffic increasing daily as the meeting became imminent. Various concerns were expressed ahead of this five-day training experience. Reservations voiced concerned participants' educational attainment, English language skills, disability, cultural differences, general expectations and confidence levels.

At one time it seemed unlikely that so many differences could possibly be accommodated and yet the partners had anticipated them all and were meticulous in their planning.

Inevitably not all expectations could be entirely met. But the feedback from the partner delegates showed that there was an overwhelming level of satisfaction surrounding the whole experience.

Partners attained a strong sense of engagement with the delivery of the final course and the involvement in some capacity of all the partners in the training provided an excellent tool for binding the efforts of the partnership together.

Evaluation

The PEPE project is both self-aware and self-critical. This invariably is a sign of a confident and ambitious partnership, and once again this has proven to be the case. Among the partners there is a strong commitment to reflection and review and a work package was dedicated entirely to evaluation and dissemination.

This process has facilitated the efforts of the external evaluation and has allowed all the partners and participants to work in a complementary fashion.

Internal evaluators have been thorough in capturing the responses of peer educators and trainers, although in some cases the quality of the feedback was restricted by the standard format of identifying users' feelings and suggestions.

Commercial exploitation

The partners are eager to exploit the products of the PEPE project.

The ease with which the products and training packages are accepted will be an acid test of their value and utility. The main caveat is whether the organisations that made up the partnership will be as geared to or motivated by the commercial exploitation of the project as they have been to achieving its developmental goals.

Ultimately the variety of organisational types that make up the partnership affects the extent to which the products will be fully commercialized. Marketing and selling activities do not always come as easily to public sector academic and training organisations as they do to private training organisations. In some cases the public sector partners' limited financial resources and organisational ethos may not match the urgency with which for-profit partners approach the task.

Partners need to reflect on a local exploitation strategy that meets their own circumstances and requirements in the same way that the dissemination strategy has been both locally and nationally planned.

It may well prove to be most effective if ongoing marketing and commercialisation is turned into a joint effort between selected groups of partners who share the same ambitions. In this way too economies of scale and resource would be maximized.

Communications

A communications protocol was established from the start of the project. Its success was facilitated by the rapid establishment of the website and extranet, including the 'quick mail' and forum facility. These measures provided an effective medium for communication, which has been exploited by the group.

There is a tangible respect between partners and this has encouraged group work and meaningful co-operation.

Relevance

The relevance of the project to diverse target groups has been fully tested. Flexibility, adaptability and relevance have been common denominators of the

entire series of linked Leonardo mentoring projects. The model has proved to be just as relevant to the new target groups as it was to the preceding ones.

The Cypriot partners, Synthesis, have been able to transfer the work of PEPE to their own target groups. Recent immigrants to Cyprus are often excluded from the labour market.

Synthesis implemented their PEPE pilot project by focusing on a small group of 12 participants who would act as 'multipliers of knowledge' within their own communities.

They also assembled a hearing impaired group via a mentorship programme and are successfully using the PEPE training products with them.

The Danish partners, Kold College, were keen to build on a system which, in their view, has been instrumental in effecting a reduction of dropout numbers from 28% to 23%. The Danish government has plans to roll out mentoring nationally, making engagement with this project particularly helpful and timely.

There is strong anecdotal evidence that peer educator engagement has a significant impact on the retention and achievement of mentees. Gower College maintain impressive statistics that demonstrate the impact this work can have on isolated and under-achieving participants.

As most academic studies have concluded, it is nonetheless difficult to offer conclusive scientific proof of this correlation when myriad other factors are evidently in play.

Synergy of partner activity

Project planning has successfully provided a strong fit between partners who have shown themselves able to lead in areas in which they have significant experience.

Established partners have provided insights for those who are relatively new to mentoring and peer education, while new partners have introduced fresh thinking and perspective to the established core group.

The peer education training course began its development phase during the meetings in Lisbon and Athens. Further work was done on it by Gower College with input from all relevant partners in the development process.

The need for local steering groups is essential and all the partners have some local mechanism in place for this purpose.

Differences introduced to the meetings model included parallel meetings and the resulting need for partner delegates to be available to cover both meetings. Sensibly, the partners had previously agreed the protocol for these scenarios and the original arrangements were effectively maintained.

The delivery method, learning materials and adaptability have been thoroughly explored. Issues that emerged from the training in Bulgaria included adaptation as a result of the pilots and the challenge of transferability to e-learning.

Institutional support

As has been demonstrated a number of times in previous linked projects, the support of senior managers or line managers for the process is important and can be crucial to the progress and ultimate success of the work.

It is very unusual for a project of this nature to succeed without strong explicit or implicit support from senior managers within each organisation. The PEPE partners have been fortunate to enjoy the enthusiastic support of their own policy-makers even if that only represents a tacit form of support.

The quality of the mentoring work and its perceived material effect on mainstream issues such as retention of students and learners and overall achievement has cemented that support.

The importance of ensuring that dissemination begins within the partners' own organisations should never be underestimated and ought to be the priority activity before the focus moves on to carrying the message and benefits of the project further afield.

Partners would be well advised, where appropriate, to consider in the first instance the benefits of the project for their organisation as a whole and present those benefits to their own institutions.

European reputation

The PEPE partnership is the culmination of a succession of themed peer mentoring and peer education projects in which this core partnership has been involved.

PEPE in particular draws heavily on the contribution to this field provided by the very successful NetMentor project, which preceded it.

It can be safely said that the established partners in PEPE have developed an understanding and expertise in this area that matches those of the best providers in the European Union.

The partners have fully tested the success of a wide range of models of delivery and an equally wide range of applicability of mentor and peer educator training to diverse groups.

This transnational understanding has been applied both in this and previous projects just when the concept and value of mentoring and peer education have become better understood and more valued across the E.U.

Cost-effectiveness

PEPE is the latest manifestation of a suite of projects that have fully demonstrated the cost benefits of linking together related projects.

A consistent leadership, core partnership and web and media provider, together with complementary partners, have been able to offer a coherent framework over a number of years.

Each development has built on the last so that lessons learned and investments made have been capitalized upon rather than re-invented on each occasion.

This plan says a good deal about the foresight of the funders in choosing to support this project. In my view they have been well rewarded by the quality of the final outcomes.

Training the trainers: Nicosia, Cyprus, November 2010

The PEPE trainers' training, which was delivered in Cyprus in 2010 and led by Gower College, was equally as successful as the PIP peer educator training in Bulgaria in 2008. Partners were then requested to pilot the training in their own countries, customising the training to meet their particular requirements.

Case study: Trainer's training in Bulgaria

In Bulgaria in May 2011 MCA undertook a trainers' training course for eight professionals working with disadvantaged groups to become trainers for peer educators.

The two-day course began with introductions and expectations.

It then focused on the theory and benefits of peer education and took the participants through communication and presentation skills, teamwork, personal skills and qualities required. It also introduced the participants to MentorSpace.

The partners customised the course at the request of the participants to include preparation for job searching, which met the specific needs of the participants from the Bulgarian Central Commission for Combating Juvenile Delinquency for whom this is an important priority.

The Head of the Commission was interested in the final products and as a result of the training was actively considering how, with some adaptations, it could be embedded into their training programmes.

Issues for further reflection

Evidence collected throughout the course of the project together with recorded partner comments have consistently indicated that this has been a mature project made up of experienced and committed partners. They have been clear about their motivation and expectations and have worked synergistically to achieve those goals.

Nevertheless a number of issues emerged that should form a basis for further reflection.

Whilst the following comments are my views drawn from evidence collected from the project, it is worth stating that they are shared and cross-referenced by a majority if not all of the partners, the participants and the National Agency.

Protocols

Issues and concerns, where they have arisen or been commented on by project leaders, administrators, partners and others, have mostly centred around protocol and timely compliance with agreed targets and activities.

The protocols for the partnership were very clear and although there has been general conformity there has also been some slippage.

Partners have not always produced reports in a timely way and compliance with time scales has not always been maintained. This has proved critical and occasionally perilous when it came to financial returns.

Punctuality at meetings is important. Partners need to remind themselves of its significance and the loss of valuable training and meeting time which occurs when it is not achieved. The greatest number of negative comments, presented to me and the internal evaluator after the training events in Bulgaria and Cyprus, were on the subject of punctuality.

Trainers were obliged to declare on a number of sessions that they had to modify or truncate their session to fit with the shorter time available. Inevitably those who were on time became somewhat frustrated by those who were not.

Laptops and mobiles were routinely used in meetings but it was not always apparent why they should be if they were not being used for the presentation or

for taking notes. This is a commonplace practice in some projects but I strongly suggest it is not best practice and does little to tie groups together.

It is difficult for a conference to be focused when 'multitasking' such as this is taking place. Those people making presentations, especially inexperienced or nervous presenters, were sometimes distracted when faced by an audience many of whom were using computers at the same time.

In my view, the guideline should be to follow what would be acceptable in a senior meeting in one's own organisation whenever training or a presentation is being delivered.

Partners and participants all mentioned disturbing interruptions that included private conversations, text messaging, informal coffee breaks and lateness in their feedback as being the most negative of the behaviours they observed.

Nevertheless this criticism has to be seen within the wider context of generally focused and hard-working groups who ran through significant amounts of work in every meeting and the general informality and conviviality that is the mark of relaxed and productive transnational partnership meetings.

Final products

Although the work programme seemed to comply with the original plan, more than one partner thought it would have been beneficial to have completed 'final products' earlier in order to disseminate them and invite third parties to test and use them.

An extra contribution from partners to ensure the quality of the final products might have been appropriate and may reflect a variation in the commitment of some of the partners to producing outstanding deliverables. This observation fits with the suggestion that partners have varying incentives and levels of determination to pursue the full exploitation of the work.

Financial reporting

The majority of financial reports were submitted after the deadlines agreed. This practice did not always allow sufficient time for checking, processing and proper submission and could potentially have risked the funding of the project. Equally, workshop leader reports were not always provided and dispatched punctually.

This lack of full compliance sometimes placed unnecessary and unfair pressure upon the project leaders and administrators. They, in turn, were not always able to provide the data in the agreed timely fashion for the National Agency who are vigilant with regard to project monitoring and the keeping of deadlines.

All reports and returns were eventually completed but it is important to be reminded that the partnership is also a financial and business contract with important responsibilities that accompany the benefits of the funding.

Communication

The use of the partners' forum was slow to begin with, as might have been expected, but soon a much more active volume of traffic was discernible, particularly when planning and training issues were being finalised.

The developers are now satisfied with the level of use and acknowledge that the initial version of the public website was not as user-friendly as they would have wished. Following a major reconfiguration and upgrade the website was largely transformed and, according to the developers, there are "no more excuses!"

The work package leader and website contractor invited partners to submit articles, photos and videos. Targets were set for each partner. The initial response was slow but there was a steady improvement.

The website is the showcase for the project. There remains the ever-present possibility that all the very positive work developed by partners is not as well promoted as it might be to those not fully involved in the development of PEPE without the further and ongoing enrichment of the website.

Representation

The partners have not always felt able to provide the full complement of staff to transnational meetings to which they committed in the project application.

Although there was some dissent from this approach, the partners agreed to pursue the original plan to organise the work with meetings running in parallel, essentially because the application was written with that format in mind.

It was very important, therefore, that partners provided a minimum of two representatives to each meeting if the work was to be properly completed.

But it was not always the case that two representatives from each partner attended the transnational meetings. This lack of full representation in some areas affected the work and the links between the partner countries.

Setting meeting times is an arduous task and revisions can be equally time-consuming to arrange. When committing to meeting times it is important that all partners are fully represented by those people who will be engaged in those meetings.

Measurement of outcomes

The measurement and impact of the outcomes and benefits of peer education are hard to quantify. This is a perennial difficulty, as I have pointed out earlier. All the literature, as the Portuguese partners FMH have noted, demonstrates that the impact of peer mentoring and peer education is very difficult to measure.

However, all the anecdotal evidence and beneficiary feedback points to peer education and mentoring as being a very valuable, cost-effective and mutually beneficial process among all the groups with whom it has been piloted.

Equality of contribution

Not all partners have the same level of experience and expertise in this field. However, every partner has been able to make a good contribution to all the work being done even if they have not always been in a position to make as full a contribution as other partners.

In fact the varying levels of development and expertise have been useful in allowing for more experienced partners to offer a degree of mentoring to others who were setting out on this process for the first time.

Evaluation feedback and strategy

The evaluation from partners, trainers and participants needs to be complete and comprehensive. This has not always entirely been the case. The suggestion is that there needs to be a more rigorous approach to completing and collecting feedback and that active guidance should be offered on what the organisers are looking for.

Politeness has sometimes superseded critical feedback and limited the amount of important information that could be provided for the partners and trainers, which they need to enhance their provision.

Feedback from partners suggested that the strategy for the respective roles of external and internal evaluator could be clearer. Several partners requested more documentation ahead of partner meetings in order to prepare more fully.

Accreditation

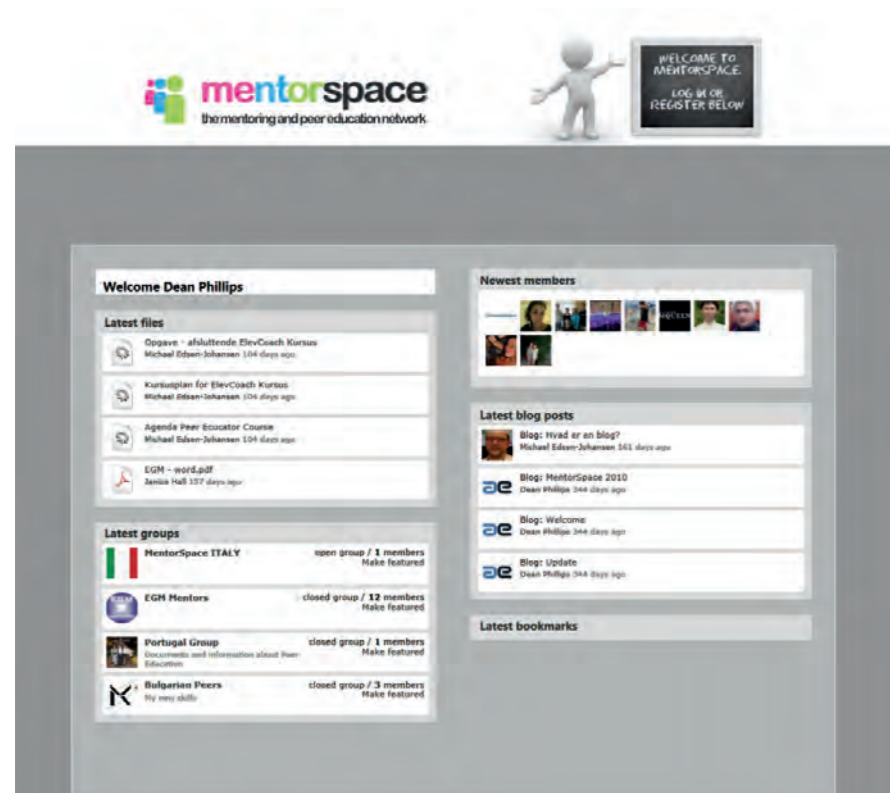
The challenge of obtaining national accreditation for all the partner countries is proving to be problematic.

Progress reported at the time of the meeting held in Odense, Denmark, in June 2011 was varied.

The partners from Bulgaria, Portugal, Cyprus and Greece reported that there is no mechanism for influencing those responsible for national curriculum decisions. In Italy the decisions are made regionally, while Kold College in Denmark are still pursuing strategies for local accreditation.

In the U.K., Gower College have produced an Open College Network (OCN) unit, which has been accredited for peer education. They are exploring the feasibility of extending their accreditation to the other partners. Probably the main barrier would be the necessity to fund U.K.-based assessors to provide the external assessment required for the qualification to be awarded.

Ultimately it is hoped that the training will become a European accredited programme via the EQF system.



Conclusions

The project has developed rapidly with experienced, engaged and enthusiastic partners who have worked together very effectively.

Partners have reported their confidence in, and respect for, the work of others and the extent of joint working is apparent and supports that perception.

The key deliverables have been met and the final elements completed as evidenced by reports to the partner meeting in Odense in June 2011.

The value of transnational working in developing this project has been endorsed by all the partners and by many of the participants and peer educators. They have cited as the most important benefits an enhanced perspective and an opportunity to listen to work being conducted in a different cultural and educational environment.

Participants have been very positive about their involvement and on occasion have described the experience in life-changing terms as variously “thrilling” and “a fantastic opportunity”.

It is clear that the excitement and interest in training together as a transnational group has added a powerful dimension to the pilots and training sessions undertaken by the project.

Once again the transferability of the model to new target groups has been amply demonstrated. In the case of PEPE there has been a greater emphasis on supporting people with learning and physical disability, and the model has been shown to be just as effective and robust in its application as with previous target groups.

The impact on participants and peer educators has often been profound. Interviews, focus groups and individual feedback, as listed in this report, have provided strong evidence of the impact of the training on peer educators in particular.

Trainers noted that their confidence and understanding grew perceptibly during the week of training. For some participants it was little short of a major life experience and for many of them genuinely exciting.

In many respects the full impact of the project on target groups, employers and end users has yet to be fully tested.

The quality of the final products and the prospects for their marketing and commercial exploitation are now apparent. Their success will be determined by the continued enthusiasm and commitment of the partners.

The environment in which this latest peer educator and trainer project has been delivered has changed considerably. The products from the PEPE project could hardly have been delivered in a more receptive educational and training environment.

Peer education and mentoring practice and activity are becoming increasingly popular across E.U. member states. In some countries, including Italy and Denmark, peer mentoring is set to become, or indeed has already become, a core element of their training and educational programmes.

These profound changes to the acceptability and understanding of the benefits of mentoring will provide a much warmer climate for the further development of mentoring and peer education across the ever increasing list of groups in which the practice has been piloted and shown to be successful.

Despite some minor concerns over the process, this project has been highly successful.

The contribution of PEPE to European Union policy and the VET systems in partner countries is likely to be considerable. Denmark, for example, is taking steps to ensure that mentoring is provided as a basic entitlement for all students.

If as anticipated other countries follow suit, the materials, training programmes and experience developed by this project should have a very significant impact on that developing trend.

There is no doubt that PEPE has achieved its ambition of broadening the scope and breadth of mentor training to those who will benefit from this important and valuable support.

Overall the PEPE partners and participants have been energetic and committed throughout the project and have brought a professional enthusiasm to the project that has been exciting and refreshing to witness and a pleasure to evaluate.

Paul Garvey PGC Ltd
(External Evaluator)

Sources

- Notes from transnational meetings in Portugal, Greece, Bulgaria, Cyprus, Denmark and Wales, U.K.
- Dissemination event, Athens, March 2010
- Internal evaluations from workshops at all meetings
- Internal evaluator's six-monthly reports
- Work package leaders' reports at all meetings
- Progress reviews
- PEPE website forum
- PEPE partner meeting, Lisbon
- PEPE partner meeting, Athens
- First pilot peer educator training, Albena, Bulgaria
- Second pilot trainers' training, Nicosia, Cyprus
- PEPE partner meeting, Odense, Denmark
- ADAM and EVE databases
- Leonardo Evaluation Guidance Notes (U.K. National Agency)
- Leonardo Dissemination Notes (U.K. National Agency)
- Leonardo Transnational Partnership Guidance (U.K. National Agency)
- European Initiative for the Promotion of Internal Learning
- NetMentor booklets and products
- Lifelong Learning Programme (Leonardo)
- Validating Mentoring Programme: VM2
- Interviews: Bulgaria
- Interviews: Denmark
- Interviews: Portugal
- Interviews: Wales, U.K.
- Interviews: web and media contractor
- Case study: Trainers' Training in Bulgaria
- PIP (Peer Implementation Project) training programmes and resources
- www.europemobility.eu
- Related projects from dissemination event, Athens, March 2010
- Project managers' response to assessor's comments
- Emop: Empowering employees by internet coaching in the outsourcing environment (Leonardo)
- Ave Exemplo: Validation and Evidencing of Non-Formal and Informal Learning (Leonardo)
- Certified European eLearning Manager (Leonardo)
- Network: National Thematic Network on Social Economy: Developing non-profit organisations and those charged with co-operatives and self-organisation of citizens
- NetMentor: web-based mentoring support
- European Career Guidance Certificate (ECGC)
- Validating Mentoring 2 (VM2): Providing active support for disabled and disadvantaged people through the provision of an enhanced Code of Practice for mentoring
- European Initiative for the Promotion of Informal Learning
- Beat Bullying: Cyber peer mentoring, U.K.
- The Matrix Standard: www.matrixstandard.com
- Lifelong Learning 2007–2013
- EQF/ Europass/ credit transfer systems
- ECVET (facilitating informal and formal learning credit transfer etc/ credit accumulation)
- Thames Valley University, Reading, 5th–6th July 2010: "Introduction to Mentoring Skills" delivered by Caroline Townsend Jones, Gorseinon College (course evaluation)

