

A. Introduction to this report.

This report aims to feed back on the activity, which has taken place within the Learning Virtual Sauna transnational partnership, and identify what has been successful and also what has not worked out as originally planned. All aspects have developed the learning of the partnership and are considered to be of equal value, whether deemed successful or not.

The report has been produced jointly by all three partners, but co-ordinated and produced as a final document through the UK partnership as the common language agreed for this partnership was English. The final report is owned and approved as a correct record by all members of the transnational partnership.

This report has tried to set out each national context to show the merits of why these partners came together, as well as explain the rationale for the work undertaken as a transnational partnership. It should be read in conjunction with the external evaluator's report, as much of the research has been undertaken in partnership with the external evaluation process. The external evaluation process has provided some focus for this report, and helped the transnational partnership to recognise the real added value of being able to work within transnational partnerships and opportunities for the future.

A. 1The European Context

Economists have shown that demographics are going to be the most important factor determining Europe's economic future. Labour forces will begin to shrink over the next 25 years and ageing populations will be increasingly dependent on a smaller economically active population. Italy, France, Finland, Germany, Austria and the UK's economically active population will begin to decline by 2015.

Populations in Europe are becoming ever more ethnically diverse. 20 million legal representatives are disenfranchised from the political process and ethnic minorities are sorely under-represented both at national and at European level. Comparative rates of unemployment among ethnic minority and majority populations show the disparities: The status before Equal (Otherwiae this is a too old statistic knowledge)

Country	Ethnic unemployment %	Majority employment %
Austria	8.1	4.5
Denmark	12.3	3.7
Finland	29.3	13.5
France	23.7	11.1
Germany	20.3	9.3

Holland	20.0	4.0
Italy	12.0	11.8
Luxembourg	4.4	2.1
Sweden	33.6	6.0
UK	15.0	6.4

(Source: European Employment Observatory, Spring 1999)

The EU sets itself up as the most open and inclusive society in the world. However, most European countries are lagging behind in their efforts to recruit skills from around the world and manage diversity within their own societies. Getting this right will be key for the EU's prosperity, social cohesion and its ability to stand for democracy and human rights on the global stage.

EQUAL projects are funded to test innovative approaches, "test beds" for improving access to vocational training and employment, particularly targeting disadvantaged groups within society. The Learning Virtual Sauna transnational partnership incorporates all these aspects of the EQUAL initiative through its emphasis on "improving the quality and access to training and employment, with a particular emphasis on the use of Information Communication Technologies, linked to the developing European Knowledge Society".

B. The National Partners and their contexts:

B.1 Introduction

This section explores each partners own national context and how their national project addresses the problems they have identified. What is very clear from this analysis, is that in many instances the contexts in terms of need, poverty and lack of education are similar, even where the "geography" may be different. Disadvantage is common within each national context, and lack of access to appropriate learning across a number of generations has consolidated issues of poverty and isolation.

Disadvantage across all the partners includes exclusion from the labour market as a result of multiple disadvantage including disability, ethnicity, low levels of education and lack of appropriate and up to date skills meeting labour market needs.

B.2 The national partners.

Black Country Learning Kitchen: the context

The Black Country is in a state of economic crisis as a result of a low strength knowledge economy in terms of skills and employment. The quality of human

capital demanded by employers is low reflecting the areas occupational profile. In recent years, the knowledge economy has become key to Government economic policy and thinking. White Papers on Competitiveness have placed knowledge, skills and innovation at the heart of future prosperity for the UK. British industry, particularly manufacturing cannot be sustained by trying to compete on cost and low valued products in a global market place where the majority of the worlds' citizens earn less than the lowest wage in the UK. (Local futures April 2002) The Black Country is failing to modernise and this is evident in the Black Country more than anywhere else in the UK. The Black Country is not yet a "post industrial "landscape. The Sandwell and Walsall manufacturing sector still employs up to 35% of the population, which is more than twice the national average. The sector also maintains a low-skills workforce, which now faces a serious challenge. (Local futures, April 2002)

Current and future workers in the Black Country need to be able to absorb change such as new processes or procedures, an ability, which is severely compromised by a **lack of basic skills** such as the ability to read manuals. All workers must have transferable skills and competencies, ranging from job specific skills to more generic social or business skills. Although many skills in the manufacturing sector are high level skills, such as tool manufacture, the weakness lies with this skill being too specific and linked with a particular process and workers being too slow to adapt to change. (Local futures April 2002)

DETR 1998 shows that three of the boroughs in the Black Country appear in the top 30 of the UK's most disadvantaged communities. All have an increasing number of asylum seekers and a travelling community.

The 2000 index of for multiple deprivation shows that the Black Country has many wards with concentrated levels of deprivation and low/very low levels of literacy and numeracy. Average house prices at £100,250 is lower than the regional average of £125,817 and national average of £149,934 (HM Land Registry)

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Kista Open Academy (KOA): the context

Despite its many good intentions, Sweden has fallen behind in the area of offering higher education to all who need and want to access, compared with Sweden's nearest neighbours, Norway and Finland. The absence of an "open-university" limits the access to higher education for those groups of people who are the focus of the KOA EQUAL application. The open-university has existed

for many years elsewhere in Europe and, by creating a strong transnational partnership, KOA hoped to be able to make good use of the experience that other countries have in catering for specific disadvantaged target groups, including ethnic minorities and refugees.

Kista is a part of the town of Stockholm, situated in North Stockholm. Kista has a population of about 30,000 inhabitants. Kista is the big and “glorified” IT-Centre of Sweden (or was) but only about 5 % of the people living in Kista work there. The unemployment rate is quite high and it is a multicultural area with many immigrants from all over the world. Sollentuna and Järfälla are located in the same area. The segregation is a big problem in these areas. The amount of immigrants is high and the unemployment is very high. KOA has used a strategy to involve associations from these groups and is working with four ethnic community NGOs, representing 70, 000 people.

COESIS: the context

In Portuguese society there is a huge group of people whose “characteristics” make them groups at risk within a technological society. These are people with low levels of education including literacy and digital literacy, lacking professional qualifications (technology and personal skills), people with mobility problems due to disabilities or geographical barriers, people away from the employment market and at risk of social exclusion.

Circles of installed poverty - These are situations of persistent poverty, geographically defined, and which tend to remain so throughout generations. These areas include people amongst the most disadvantaged in Portugal, living in situations of long-lasting poverty and often in degraded urban areas (social housing). The majority of these people are within the economically active age range, and include workers from the less competitive sectors, from the parallel economy, unemployed, working in the black economy. They have low or have received no education and as a result have few or no professional qualifications. The rest are retired people living on low incomes. This is the case of the population around the project pilot sites, namely of **Vale de Campanhã and Vitória (Oporto), and of Santa Marinha (Gaia)**.

Other scenarios exist in the poor rural areas of the Portuguese interior, where living and depending on the traditional agriculture sector is dominant. Here is a declining population, almost all illiterate, older and the majority being female, living from subsistence farming. This is the case of the population around the pilot site of **Bragança**.

People with disabilities represent 9,16% of the Portuguese population. In the Oporto district, 10,21% and in the Bragança district 11,65%. Exclusion from employment is a major indicator, close to 72,6% in case of mental impairment. This exclusion is further aggravated by a short formal education. In the majority of the cases, the students with disabilities did not go to secondary school. In the case of physical impairment, the level of education is higher, and in mixed impairment it is the lowest. There are still a great number of people with disabilities who have no access to education or rehabilitation programs. The

COESIS project targets disabled people at the pilot sites of CRPG and ASCUDT.

People with low qualifications, illiteracy and obsolete qualifications. Within the knowledge and information society, populations, which have had a limited education and have low qualifications, or qualifications which are not relevant to the employment market, are increasingly vulnerable to unemployment and to social exclusion. There are two categories of excluded: the ones without literacy skills and the ones which, despite having some literacy skills, have few basic skills such as reading, writing or numeracy. These are the key skills of most essential to get a job. In addition the technological changes have also resulted in the lack of accessing professional qualifications related to the reconversion of workers into new types of work. These types of problems exist practically in every population within the reach of the project's pilot sites.

B.3 The National Projects and meeting identified needs

The contexts have identified specific issues and target groups. Each of the national EQUAL projects was developed to meet these issues and overcome the barriers to employment.

Black Country Learning Kitchen

The approach and methodologies being used are reaching out to non learners and non traditional learners such as: teenage mums, people with disabilities, homeless, ethnic community groups (particularly women), older people, those lacking basic and key skills and those facing redundancy. Engaging and motivating these learners has been at the heart of the delivery and partnership work. Researching user needs has influenced design and development of community based provision leading to new learning environments being created, which are local, friendly, non-threatening and safe. New virtual learning environments have been used to motivate and engage as well as empower beneficiaries to tell their stories to others with the aim of them becoming Learning Ambassadors, encouraging others to overcome their fears and barriers and return to learn. Innovative uses of non traditional learning venues such as baby clinics and health centres, use of cultural initiatives as hooks such as Bollywood and sport to attract learners, training in leading edge technologies such as robotics for young people are all examples.

Beneficiaries were disadvantaged groups from across the Black Country:

- Halesowen College and the Clancey Foundry (44 beneficiaries). This project targets those workers at Clancey facing redundancy, their families and other community members.
- Dudley College and Learning Ambassadors, working with Dudley Muslim Association, The Lighthouse Project and The St. Thomas network (28 beneficiaries). Targeting returners to learning from the priority areas of Dudley, including people wishing to move from volunteering to paid employment, unemployed, older workers (50+), and ethnic minority groups especially women.

- CRYASIC project (18 beneficiaries). The project targets disaffected young people (16 plus), who have not benefited from the formal education system or other learning activity, and as such lack qualifications, are culturally disadvantaged, low skilled with little or no experience of learning or employment.
- Bollywood into Learning (34 beneficiaries) is an innovative concept using **ICT and culture** to engage with young Asian women by using their interest in their culture as the hook into learning.
- Learning 2 Be is a project, which supports the national agenda on basic skills. This project, following detailed research aims to produce **on line learning** for basic skills, particularly for literacy and ESOL. The aim is to deliver appropriate learning for adults, producing resources, which are culturally relevant to the learners.
- The Light House project (53 beneficiaries) is a community based voluntary organisation reaching out to over 1400 learners from the local community. Their project is clearly about accessibility at local level and offering flexible programmes, which enable learners to join at any time.
- The Equaliser project (40 beneficiaries). The project targets young people least likely to access sports and leisure courses through mainstream provision, widening participation in learning.
- **Antena** (29 beneficiaries) offers creative and innovative approaches to learning using creative technologies related to photography, film and music to engage with young people with disabilities. The project helps these young people overcome stigma related to disability, and address issues such as bullying.
- **Capturing the Past**, (67 beneficiaries) a library-based project, uses free access to the internet and learning to research family trees to engage with older people out of the labour market
- **t's a Small World** (11 beneficiaries), a project offering high level IT skills leading to the development of web sites, based in the community and voluntary sector within a base for young homeless people, but targeting older learners.
- **Manor Farm** (221 beneficiaries) initially ran a successful taster programme in ICT for local residents but now targets teenage mums on two local housing estates, inviting them into an internet café environment as well as delivering the programme in the local baby clinic.
- **Stroke survivors** (55 beneficiaries) is a project targeting those recovering from strokes, an excellent project using beneficiaries to lead and guide the delivery of the initiative.
- **Equal Pathways** It targets adults who have suffered a head injury, stroke or other disability. Traditionally in Wolverhampton there would not have been the support needed by these clients to access training or return to work programmes because of their diverse and complex problems

Kista Open Academy (Sweden, Stockholm)

Kista Open Academy's aim is to realise the concept of the "open-university" in Sweden, particularly to empower non-traditional learners to access HE. The overall goal is to counteract social, economic and ethnic segregation by providing high-quality tools to enable disadvantaged groups to fulfil their needs for lifelong learning. Implementation of the project is founded on flexible education systems, the experience of Popular Adult Education and a modern information technology infrastructure. A development partnership has been formed from municipalities, universities, institutes of higher education, associations of ethnic groups and industry. All will use the open-university as a powerful means of counteracting social, economic and ethnic segregation.

Due to cut backs in funding from EQUAL in Sweden, the project does not include any piloting with beneficiaries, but can only prepare by working with the key strategic agencies in Stockholm. However, as a result of the networking, KOA has tried to influence the central administration in Stockholm to introduce open learning centres in local communities to provide access to learning through ICT and e learning. This goal has been achieved and it is now introduced into five boroughs, totally financed by the municipalities.

The network operates in two ways:

- 1) using Kista Open Academy as an umbrella organisation, it allows several of the member organisations to initiate joint strategic development projects;
- 2) it also operates as a forum for meetings where member organisations can initiate projects on a more informal basis.

Kista Open Academy is also a lobbying organisation that markets and disseminates information about the open university. Within the project, high priority has been placed on proposing changes to the rules and the system of educational grants, since these are a major obstacle to, for example, the international distance studies, which are important to the target groups. The open university will be open to all who can and wish to study, irrespective of formal qualifications and without restriction by the student grants system.

There were no direct beneficiaries in the project as a result of cut backs in funding. Beneficiaries would have been the disadvantaged groups within Stockholm, who lack skills and qualifications to access employment. This would include black and ethnic minority groups, refugees and asylum seekers, women, lone parents, people with disabilities, young people and unemployed. To be able to participate in higher education they need many years of complementary studies, which is impossible and it takes a long time. It would be very expensive for the individuals and for the state.

As a result, the target groups for support within the activity have been those organisations in the public, private and community/voluntary sector which wish to develop access for hard to reach clients, particularly those working with ethnic minority groups.

In KOA's national work KOA have invited "people" to a range of seminars as beneficiaries and one of the events was a "Hearing" with universities and decision-makers which was a great success. The work has given a clear signal

to many universities and to politicians. The information about the project has been spread into many regions and questions and proposals about collaboration has arisen as a result. Hearing 2 (in October 2004) was with local, regional and national politicians and public organisations such as the Swedish Association of Local Authorities, Labour market associations, ministries and universities.

COESIS (Portugal)

The project intended to develop and implement a system to support information, counselling and life long learning of those people in a situation of social disadvantage by:

- working with the unemployed/facing unemployment
- promoting the continuous development of their skills and qualifications,
- supporting their employability and employment,
- guaranteeing equal opportunities in the access to the information and knowledge society,
- fighting against social exclusion and favouring the construction of an open and cohesive society.

The project intended to identify, promote and spread good practice, at the level of Corporate Social Responsibility and Citizenship, in the domain of Lifelong Learning of socially disadvantaged groups, promoting social and political visibility and social cohesion.

The life long learning and employment support system developed within the project had to be a non-alternative original model, complementing the already existing structures. It needed to educate by “entertaining”, based on learning how to learn (edutainment pedagogical model). It aimed to be similar to a Web site on citizenship, where people were able to build bridges to information and knowledge.

The working model was to be built within the development of strategies for the target-group’s motivation and engagement in life long learning. It had to be integrated into other actions already developed by the organisations involved, so adding value to what has already been done.

Disadvantaged social groups have been targeted, and include people vulnerable to poverty, lacking several kinds of resources and accumulating several types of disadvantages which make it difficult for them to access citizenship and employment. All these factors make them an easy target of social and professional exclusion.

Bragança – ASCUDT’s pilot site. Supports around 100 disabled people with occupational activities and personal and social development activities. These are mostly inactive adults with low levels of formal education. Given the kind of services offered, its main needs are the availability of learning opportunities in the scope of ICT, personal skills and employment promotion. Certification is considered important. ASCUDT needs to acquire skills in the ICT and social mediation areas.

Oporto – CSPNSV pilot site. Develops its activity with and for the Oporto historical area and population. It is a degraded/deprived urban area, where several exclusion factors come together, due to early abandoning of formal education, unemployment, lack of education and professional qualifications. Around 30% of the young people do not have education beyond the 6th year. 7,7% are illiterate and 54,6% have only basic education (4 years). The unemployment rate is 10,1% and 35,3% of the young people work in precarious conditions. The Centro's clients are young people and adults; the majority are women; around half have between 6 and 9 years of formal education; 45% are unemployed. Given the kind of services offered, its main needs are the availability of learning opportunities in the scope of ICT, personal skills and employment promotion. They consider certification to be important. Their employees need to acquire skills in the social mediation area.

Vila Nova de Gaia – CRPG pilot site. Supports people with disabilities in reintegrating back into active and professional life. They suffer from physical impairment (44%), are unemployed looking for a new job (16%) or the first job (74%); they have acquired a disability resulting from sickness or accidents (19%); most of them are male. 33% have 6 years of formal education and 34% have 9 years. Benefits from the projects include the development of new life long learning strategies, motivation of disadvantaged groups and creation of learning ambassadors. The beneficiaries have participated in project development, experimentation and validation.

B.4 Meeting the EQUAL principles

Equal Opportunities

All the national projects have worked to open up education, training and employment to disadvantaged client groups.

EQUAL Learning Kitchen has been about empowering disadvantaged clients who are non-traditional learners to benefit from the developing knowledge society in the Black Country. Projects provide access to learning at the levels appropriate to each learner, but ensure all learners improve their basic skills and access ICT training in both formal and informal structures. Barriers to access are overcome and learners are supported to remain within their learning programmes and progress. Support includes provision of transport for people with disabilities, one to one guidance, listening to what beneficiaries say as an equal, inclusion on some of the theme groups such as User Needs and motivation and engagement. Beneficiaries have participated on transnational meetings

KOA's main goal has been to develop Equal Opportunities in higher learning for adults – an open university without any formal (exams) or other restrictions for entrance. KOA has also worked for supporting new infrastructure in big cities with learning centres as in small cities and rural areas but also for the recognition and acceptance of real competencies instead of formal qualifications. KOA wants people to be able to validate their own

competencies as they can do in Finland. KOA has also worked to identify obstacles and to be able to influence politicians and decision-makers to change regulations that today bar adults from higher education and often specifically ethnic communities from easier entrance to higher education and training.

COESIS has focussed on providing access to ICT and breaking down the digital divide between those that have and those that have not. Using ICT to provide access to learning for those who have not been able to participate in education, training and employment as equal citizens. Issues of rural isolation have been addressed and in supporting beneficiary needs in accessing learning through the provision of transport, and relevant aids and adaptations.

Empowerment

Equal Opportunities and Empowerment are often inter-related. Empowerment cannot easily be increased without equal opportunities and all the partners have worked to strengthen these opportunities. This will open many doors for the empowerment of the target groups.

At KOA both questions have focussed discussions and in dissemination activities. Often it has been the attitudes within society more than the regulations, which have had negative impact on the people and stopped the target groups in their greater involvement in society and in achieving their personal ambitions. To involve these target groups in the Equal work has been an important aspect and focus for discussions to achieve dissemination of the experiences of these groups. This involvement has empowered them individually and as lobby groups.

Empowerment is one of the nodal concepts from the Equal ideology. This concept has been applied by the COESIS development partnership, through ongoing consultation with the target-group and by setting up a target group Committee as well as a staff Committee for this purpose. The process of continuous evaluation of the products, at the different stages of the project, has resulted in regular integration of the target groups' feedback. This has been the main empowerment process, involving beneficiaries throughout the development, piloting, review and adaptation of the COESIS portal.

The theme of Learning Ambassadors certainly empowers beneficiaries to encourage others to participate in learning. This has been the thrust within the Black Country, empowering beneficiaries to bring and support others into learning. More development took place to make the voice of the beneficiary heard within the overall management and delivery of the project at local, regional and transnational levels. The evaluation process has encouraged peer evaluation. A beneficiary led event raised the profile of the beneficiaries and their projects within the Black Country, and a visit to Brussels by 23 beneficiaries from all 14 projects gave them a voice in the heart of European politics.

ICT

ICT has been used in many different ways to meet both the needs of the national projects and their beneficiaries. The most common use has been for communications and in the development of virtual learning environments.

Black Country Learning Kitchen

Dudley College – Learning Ambassadors, ICT within this programme is dependent on the needs of the individual, and relies on initial assessment. The programme at St. Thomas was underpinned by IT training at the level needed by the beneficiary. This included access to Learn Direct courses.. The OCN Essential Skills for Outreach work programme includes an IT module for those without IT skills. The Community Mentors programme undertakes the initial assessment of IT needs, and enables the beneficiary to progress to the most appropriate course.

Halesowen College and Clancey's Foundry. The focus of the project is to develop the IT skills of the Clancy workforce, particularly those facing redundancy. The IT centre accesses Learn Direct and uses CD ROMs for Basic Skills. Programmes include Computing for the Terrified, CLAIT, and ECDL.

CRYSIC Media Rich Technology. An ICT based programme, linking the building of the robotic arms to operation through the programming of a PC. Initially the project was to include the beneficiaries developing their own web sites, but this has been reviewed and adapted to a web site being developed by Gateway and beneficiaries inputting their personal profiles onto the web site. Beneficiaries achieve an OCN Qualification, the Computer Hardware Certificate.

St. Thomas Network, Join the Search Party. Learners will with support, be engaged in a project of their choosing and discover new and exciting ways to learn their hobby through the Internet. Once hooked the learner will be encouraged to undertake further training though UK on-line, learn direct, computer art and many more other computer-based programmes, broadening their horizons within the learning culture.

Bollywood into Learning. The project is delivered through the use of laptops. The project aims to engage women into informal learning through the "hook" of the Bollywood CD which is used as an induction to IT, e-mail, internet, using a CD, word, understanding how a computer works. Bollywood Learning Ambassadors will use laptops in community locations to demonstrate the CD to others from that community, ensuring access to IT in non-formal learning environments

The Equaliser E-learning environments have been set up in leisure centres where unemployed learners can access provision. Learners will have access to "performer" software packages designed to assess a candidate's skills/strengths plus appraisal of company/team objectives. This tool can help learners to map skills to National Occupational standards and so enable project staff to guide to further training.

Learning 2 Be The project has created a host of user defined electronic adult learning products that enrich, enhance and facilitate the delivery of adult learning. The products will develop new learning skills in a culturally sensitive

manner aimed at overcoming language and cultural barriers created by traditional methods of learning and teaching.

The Light House Arts and Gardens ICT is used particularly for research, creativity, design and inspiration within the project delivery. The centre has a well resourced ICT room and staff and volunteers to help beneficiaries undertake their first steps in ICT. The centre is a UK On Line centre. The project is currently setting up a cyber café and wants to further develop ICT by using the "scrap book" model to collect beneficiary stories/progression using digital photography techniques. Digital photography can then be used to further develop the arts and crafts element of the project.

Capturing the Past. The project uses existing community IT facilities in Walsall libraries, which provide free internet access. The library booking software allows computers to be reserved for beneficiaries and the tutor can track how often library computers are being used by individuals. Beneficiaries learn how to access library IT facilities and can use these between sessions and after the project finishes. The course uses available online databases and websites; these are available on any computer with free internet access.

First Base, It's a Small World this project opens up the world of ICT through learning about IT through informal processes such as producing an on line newsletter in a church centre. The target area traditionally had no access to IT training in the immediate area, but this project now provides local access. Learning includes tutor led activity covering basic ICT skills and web design theory, as well as practical based application encouraging learners to apply knowledge with a personal or group bias.

Manor Farm The project works with teenage mums at the centre's cyber café to identify their learning needs, and use the cyber cafe as a learning environment. Beneficiaries will be able to access Learn Direct courses, information about vocational courses and develop skills, which have already been identified as a need for this group once their motivation has been increased. Using photography as the hook to encourage beneficiaries to use IT, IT has been used to produce digital photography. The centre is exploring the new pre-ECDL programme to build confidence within the groups to move nearer to formal accreditation to recognise the skills being developed in the hope that this will encourage them to progress onto the ECDL course.

Antena "Arts New Technology – Encouraging New Abilities". The project aims to provide creative technology arts projects for groups of people of varied ability across the borough of Walsall, particularly those who do not have easy access to services and with a focus on young adults.

Stroke Survivors ICT is integrated into the project, as IT is a communication tool for many of the beneficiaries, who would not be able to communicate in any other way. Beneficiaries can choose whether they wish to follow formal ICT qualifications, or learn on an informal basis using ICT to meet their specific needs. Beneficiaries have produced their own newsletter using ICT.

Equal Pathways All beneficiaries are offered a wide range of ICT training suitable for their individual needs. Courses undertaken to date have included CLAIT, CLAIT Plus, Web Design, MOS packages and PhotoShop.

KOA.

ICT has been used in communications between the partners and for the distribution of all project documentation. All documents that any group or individual have wanted to see has been placed on the homepage and is published there. Announcements for events were also received via the Internet

As in the national communication strategy, KOA has used ICT for communication within the transnational work. KOA has also tried to use an electronic site for announcements for the Swedish seminars, but it was not a success. It was difficult to get people to register their participation in the seminar via the Internet. It was easier to centralize it. They preferred to send a list via the co-ordinator.

KOA made two attempts (in the User Needs and Learning Ambassadors groups) to use a modern tool – a simple ICT based community called cAme. This Management tool can be used for communications and for an easy way of structuring facts, discussions and content. It is easy to create reports and to avoid anyone from being isolated from the discussions. The tool was offered for free to the transnational partnership, but it has not been successful. It was the same problem as above. The tool is very widely used in Finland, Germany and the US. There was a firewall problem in Portugal that gave one participant some problems in using cAME. cAme is still open but there is no activity.

COESIS

Some ICT tools have been used in the ongoing project development and implementation. E mail was the one by far more used than any other for communications. A forum and project management software have also been used to support the overall management and general work activities.

The project focus has been the development of a virtual format or **Web site**, (portal) using the Internet, allowing open and flexible use [www.coesis.org]. It is similar to a Web site on citizenship, where people are able to build bridges to information and knowledge, which meet their specific needs. The introduction of new practices and working methodologies [ICT based] in the Centres of Certification of Competencies and at the level of the institutions/staff involved in the project has been essential.

The development partnership has been particularly interested in:

- new information on lifelong learning models and tools, based on communication and information technologies;
- New methodologies for management and social mediation adapted to the new environments and tools;
- New ways of recognising and validating the skills obtained through lifelong learning environments based on information communication technologies;
- New experiences with natural and local networks as a vehicle to assure autonomy in the access to knowledge and stimulation for lifelong learning

C. Learning Virtual Sauna – the transnational partnership

C.1 Why Learning Virtual Sauna?

As the transnational partnership was developing, the partners needed to find a name, which met their ethos for collaboration. For all partners “learning” and access to learning were underpinning themes. All the partners were in some way also using “virtual” learning environments to widen participation in learning for those currently not able to access learning an information. **But why Sauna?**

The partners believed that each had to learn from the others, but how could this be maximised to the benefit for all? All partners agreed that the best learning took place within friendly, comfortable and relaxed surroundings, where mutual friendship and respect existed. In Scandanavia, the “sauna” provides the environment where both family and friends meet to relax and discuss issues of importance to them, and so the transnational collaboration became formally known as Learning Virtual Sauna.

C.2 Aims and Objectives

A summary of the Learning Virtual Sauna transnational co-operation agreement is attached at **Annex A**. The overall aims are summarised below

- Understand how to motivate and engage the target groups within the context of lifelong learning
- Identify and develop strategies and methodologies to engage the target groups
- Integrate non formal/informal learning into the emerging learning pathway
- Find solutions which meet user needs
- Discuss, research and report on different learning environments and experiences in order to help partners to set up their learning interventions
- Pilot and validate the role of learning intermediaries (The Learning Ambassador)
- Define the role and design/develop a common curriculum (certification) for Learning Ambassadors
- Provide guidance and a range of tools for policy makers in the context of ICT learning

The partnership agreed that in order to meet these aims, four working groups would need to be set up to deliver this. These working groups mirrored activity within each national project and were based on four themes, each also being adopted within each national context.

- User Needs
- Motivation and engagement
- Learning Environment
- Learning Ambassadors

The transnational theme groups were led by one of the partner countries, which tried to ensure that the roles and responsibilities were evenly shared:

- Sweden - research into end user needs
- Portugal – Learning Environments
- UK – motivation and engagement
- Portugal/UK – Learning Ambassadors

C.3 The deliverables

The partnership also agreed common deliverables and outputs. Not all of these were achieved to the full. Deliverables and levels of achievement are described below.

- Common web site (Sweden to provide a home page, on the cAME web site). This was set up, but partners from Portugal and the UK did not fully utilise this facility. Portugal had problems with a firewall.
- Common communication system (UK to be the secretariat, English to be the common language). This was achieved in part, but due to high staff turnover within Learning Kitchen, communications broke down over a number of periods. The UK co-ordinated final production of both the external evaluation report and final Learning Virtual Sauna report.
- Rotating co-ordination of management groups and chairs. This happened in that which ever country hosted a management group meeting, that country also became chair of the full management sessions.
- Research: needs analysis, research methodologies, learning environments, learning ambassadors. This was achieved in part through the theme groups as discussed in more detail below.
- Transnational evaluation: external evaluator appointed and transnational external evaluation report produced.
- 9 Seminars/conferences/management meetings (transnational), produce 4 reports on project activity. The meetings took place as agreed in the timetable, but detailed reports from each of the theme groups not available due to staff turnover rates within Learning Kitchen.
 - June 2002 (Portugal)
 - October 2002 (UK)
 - February 2003 (Sweden)
 - June 2003 (Portugal)
 - October 2003 (Finland)
 - February 2004 (UK)
 - September 2004 (Sweden)
 - February /March 2005 (UK)
 - May 2005 (Sweden).
- Joint papers.
- 2 sets of guidelines.
- Study visits (management). Visits to projects took place as part of both UK meetings, and as part of the Swedish meeting in September 2004.

- Shared good practice was undertaken through the four theme groups as discussed below.
- Identification of synergies was achieved in part through the four theme groups as discussed below.
- Joint training
- Testing out of new learning interventions, work across countries to pilot and test new methodologies. This was one of the weakest areas in terms of achievement, in that there was not time to deliver from all the theme groups in this way. Staff turnover within Learning Kitchen and COESIS plus the fact that KOA was not able to pilot with beneficiaries reduced the partnership's ability to deliver on this intention.
- New networks. Learning Virtual Sauna is a new network, and the four theme groups were sub networks to the transnational partnership enabling partners to continue working outside of the transnational meetings. COESIS and Learning Kitchen were included in the cAME virtual network, but this was not successful.
- Video conferencing, used only once but was not effective so not used again.
- Exchanges of key persons within the projects and/or target groups (face to face/video conferencing). Achieved in part through the study visits to projects as part of UK and Swedish transnational meetings.
- Opportunities to influence policy makers. This was only achieved in part, in that activities were carried out at national rather than transnational levels. Learning Kitchen partnered with the Black Country Knowledge Society to try and meet this aim. The conference in March 2005, included a presentation from KOA. The event in Sweden in May 2005, included presentations from the Black Country Knowledge Society. Learning Kitchen took staff and beneficiaries to Brussels in November 2004, and met with MEPs in the European Parliament.
- 1 evaluation report. A final report has been produced by the partnership, in addition to the external evaluation report referred to above.

C.4 The transnational theme groups

One of the innovative aspects of this transnational partnership has been the implementation of the four theme groups at both transnational and national levels. These theme groups have been the real working groups for the research, discussion and comparison of methodologies and approaches in working with people from disadvantaged communities. Each partner has described their interpretation of their theme group, and summarised how this impacted at transnational level. At the same time, it is clear from the activity within these groups, that each country has had its own interpretation of the theme to which they belong, and understanding each partner's cultural context has at times been seen as a barrier. The results of these comparisons have been summarised below:

User Needs

Black Country Learning Kitchen - The theme group in the Black Country explored what target beneficiaries needed before, during and after their learning programme, and how this could be delivered. “Users” are seen in terms of their very individual circumstances within the group:

- a teenage mum,
- a user with a disability or recovering from an accident or serious illness,
- a learner who cannot read, write or speak English very well,
- an employee facing redundancy or
- someone who has been out of the labour market for a long time and had lost confidence in their own skills and ability,

This group was an underpinning theme for the other three theme groups. User needs could relate to a learning environment, being able to access learning in a locally known and used centre, where friends also attended. User needs could be:

- provision of travel due to a disability,
- having a crèche,
- being where others from the same peer group are,
- requiring individual assessments for both health as well as learning needs,
- needing resources which have meaning to a user’s age, culture and level of understanding,
- access to a “buddy” in times of need to help them through and stay on the programme.

User needs are as diverse as the communities being targeted

There was a definite positive relationship within the User Needs group at transnational level. A desire to make things happen existed, but the thrust needed to pursue such aims subsided in between conferences and transnational project management meetings. There was no leader to take issues forward in UK and Portugal. This may be the result of poor leadership, but also, possibly, from the fact that all personnel had other roles and responsibilities within their own jobs on return from conferences and meetings. User Needs was the leading light for including beneficiaries within transnational partnership meetings, which impacted positively on both the transnational User Needs and Motivation and Guidance theme groups. The Black Country Learning Kitchen partnership took this further with a beneficiary event in Brussels. All transnational partners were invited to participate, but notice was too short, and budgets could not cover this extra cost. The staff report from this visit is attached at Annex B.

KOA - KOA’s main goal has been to deliver Equal Opportunities for adults in accessing higher learning – an open university without any formal (exams) and restrictions for entrance. KOA has also worked towards acceptance of real competencies instead of formal qualifications. KOA wants people to be able to validate their own competencies as they can do in Finland, as these are their real needs. KOA has also worked to influence politicians and decision-makers to change regulations that today stop adults and often specifically immigrants

from easier entrance to higher education and training and so meeting their needs.

The goals for KOA were clear, to share methodologies, results of experience and best practice acting as change agents in the field of education and training. The difficulties that adults and ethnic minorities face have often been the focus. The obstacles have been identified, including the capacity building needs (training trainers, basic skills, ICT) for the BME associations, which will deliver this type of activity. The lobby of partners on a national basis including government has been on behalf of prospective users and their needs, to provide them with access to higher education through the Open University concept. Part of this lobby has been successful, in that five Stockholm boroughs have set up community based open learning centres, funded through their own budgets. KOA's aim is to link these centres into the wider national networks such as NITUS, to provide a shop front for all adult learners.

Exchange of information at transnational level has been about obstacles (barriers) and regulations. Documents have been produced from Sweden and from Finland (The Åbo Academy University). The ethnic minority associations addressed experience and good practice regarding refugees and asylum seekers. Their experiences will be documented in the KOA final report. Reports on User Needs have been produced and they are published on the homepage.

COESIS - The Development Partnership has identified as the focus for "User Needs" the main questions concerning the need to develop ICT as a product, which is accessible for people with disabilities and for people who are socially excluded. One of the products is the COESIS portal that is accessible for all.

In response to this need for users, the COESIS project has worked with technicians from the private sector to develop a portal, which is simple to use and which easily sign posts to resources. It had to meet the needs of the diverse community it aimed to support in order to reduce their isolation.

The centres piloting the portal approach were located at distances from each other, and the concept was to explore how ICT could promote an ICT supported community through e-mail communications. On the same basis the content needed to meet end user expectations and as this was developed and piloted the system asked users to evaluate the content. The users were instrumental in choosing a new home page image, choosing from four options provided.

There are two types of user, those that drop in to access the portal for their own specific needs and those that attend as groups for a specific purpose such as job search. The portal has six options: learning, solving, citizenship, having fun, employment and information. Literacy, numeracy and IT content (basic skills) is also available. Employment includes articles on where to find work (labour market information), how to produce CVs and complete job applications, employment opportunities from journals, employment agencies

and the internet. Travel and subsistence needs while attending the centres were also addressed.

Learning from the transnational partnership impacted on the final design of the portal in terms of appealing to sight and hearing. Work with Sweden has identified an opportunity for the future to use software to produce a standard format for content meeting quality assurance requirements. The Swedish course “hub” model was of particular interest to the COESIS partnership. (refer to ANNEX C)

Motivation and engagement

Black Country - This theme group in the Black Country worked together to try and understand what will motivate hard to reach target groups. Members of the group explored ways in which to “hook” learners into learning through identifying their particular interest. Initially, many projects thought that access to IT learning could be such a hook, but it became clear from experience that this did not apply to all beneficiaries. The “hook” could lead to using IT as a tool to feed the interest but IT was not always the prime interest. Hooks identified as being successful in attracting learners into projects included hobbies (photography, music), culture and heritage, arts and genealogy. For young people the CRYSLC robotics project appealed to those with interest in science fiction. Finally, key to recruitment in community based learning is “word of mouth”, recommendations from ones own peer group. It became clear throughout the piloting phases, that other things also mattered to learners in order to not just to recruit them, but to keep them motivated and retained into learning. Key learning points are identified below:

- The Learning environment had to be safe, secure and non threatening
- One to one support to develop confidence and self esteem
- Learning at their own pace, and not in a competitive environment
- Group activity, which could lead into new friendships, and for some more positive relationships than in past experience with peers who understood the same issues.
- Incentives such as support with travel, participating on transnational visits, meeting with other beneficiaries from within their peer groups, financial support, child care, equipment and other resources
- Relationship with a role model or mentor

Transnational activity has involved beneficiary participation in these working groups. It was believed in the Black Country partnership, that for both User Needs and Motivation and engagement, that it was important to involve the target groups. As a result, four beneficiaries from different Black country projects were involved in some of these meetings, and all the transnational partners believed that this offered real added value to the transnational dimension. Feedback from the beneficiaries is attached at ANNEX D.

KOA- The main activity has been to share experiences and best practice / results between the partners. All countries have had difficulties to engage people into formal learning to increase their competence to get a job. This is

not the only barrier for the individual, they might not have the confidence or there are other reasons. It is a big challenge to find methods for the learning society to market their courses and to hook the students in a positive way. Providers also need to offer an attractive and good quality product on demand and this is not always an easy task for Swedish higher education and training organisations.

Kista Open Academy has from the beginning adopted an approach of always involving the target groups into the work and it is why KOA has associations from different ethnic minority groups as partners.

Exchanging knowledge, skills, experience and expertise have been important in the transnational workshops and other communications. This has strengthened the skills and knowledge of the people working in this field through meeting their peers from other countries that have similar experiences. To benchmark and disseminate good practice and experiences has been the focus of transnational activity. The group has produced an interim report and a final report will be produced for dissemination.

COESIS - Access to ICT has been the key motivation and engagement factor for COESIS. In general all learners have wanted ICT to interact with each other and access information, which will impact positively on their lives. Older people who initially more reticent were soon converted to the benefits of using the COESIS portal once they saw the information, which was available through this system.

The key to continued engagement has been the support from the Learning Ambassadors, who have supported them in using ICT and sign posting them to the resources. Learning Ambassadors are able to develop unique learning programmes for each beneficiary, clustering relevant activities and information in the learner portfolio. Each beneficiary can learn at their own pace in an environment, which is safe, friendly and secure working with others from their peer group with whom problems can be discussed.

Quality and relevance of the information and activities available on the portal has also been important, providing both skills and information needed for employment alongside games (edutainment) and life skills and citizenship.

Beneficiaries have also been motivated by the ability to communicate with each other, friends and family by e-mail, which has reduced their sense of isolation. When beneficiaries were asked to compare using traditional methods of learning with the COESIS portal, the response was an overwhelming vote for the portal, even from those who started without any IT skills. Even in the breaks, beneficiaries move to the bar area and access the computers in there. The "forum" allows beneficiaries to participate in discussion groups on politics, animal welfare, relationships etc. A beneficiary can start their own discussion group by asking a question in the forum.

Transnational activity has focussed on the exchange of learning between peers from each country, particularly with Sweden and the “course hub” (information attached at ANNEX C).

Learning Environment

Black Country - The Black Country investigated environments, which offered less traditional venues for engaging with learners and alternative ways of offering learning. The aim was to meet individual learners needs in terms of where, when and how learning should be delivered to be more attractive to the non-traditional learner. This included the exploration of learning in formal, non-formal and informal environments as well as new e-learning environments, with partners from the community /voluntary sector, private sector as well as more traditional further education colleges. Accessibility has also been addressed. All partners were engaged in addressing the needs of disadvantaged learners through the learning environment, identifying what attracted learners in why more mainstream provision did not. Learning Kitchen environments are located in libraries, voluntary organisations based in deprived communities or within organisations supporting communities of interest such as Asian women, people with disabilities, teenage mums etc. Results from the pilots identified that non-traditional learners lack the confidence to approach mainstream provision, as they do not see relevance for them.

Common purpose for all Learning Environments within EQUAL Learning Kitchen has been to deliver IT training to their learners, regardless of the initial “hook” used to engage with them. Development of ICT and e-learning centres has been core activity across the partnership, each project recognising the level and ability of the learners in using ICT, and what would make ICT a more attractive option.

Transnational activity in this field has explored all the above arenas, and particular interest has been in the Swedish ICT model of a Learning Environment, and the Portuguese use of paid Learning Ambassadors within an ICT Learning Environment. The report from the leader of the Learning Ambassador group as a result of the project visits and exchange of information with peers is attached at ANNEX E.

KOA - ICT environments have been the main thrust for KOA under EQUAL, exploring how an open university can be delivered on a national basis for non traditional learners to access, which at the moment is not possible. As such the key learning environment has related to e learning. KOA explored what is the pedagogical model/interface with communication systems and what training is required. [Model to define this] What support is required from the tutor/support worker in the environment, recognising these are non-traditional learners? What will be the Physical interface [CD, web, TV, games, chat room, etc]

Important was also to produce guidelines for the production of content and interfaces and to produce reports for dissemination.

KOA outside of the EQUAL initiative has ICT open learning centres based in the community. Learners can come in and access learning through these

centres using both the internet and CD ROMS. The centres are supported by staff who can deal with any issues raised, and refer to specialists as appropriate.

Within the national KOA network, the project has communicated and discussed the plans for the open-university with the ICT open learning centres within a range of organisations including libraries.

KOA aimed to produce guidelines for the development of Learning Environments on behalf of the transnational partnership. In the transnational partnership there are some that are more expert in this area with many years of experience in the global frontline. There was discussion in the group about the goals and methods of working. An interim report was produced. The exchange of experience has been interesting.

COESIS - A broad view of a learning environment is something that facilitates the learning process. For the development partnership a learning environment is a physical, intellectual, psychological environment which facilitates learning through ICT connectivity and the community. In implementing this theoretical view the COESIS project built a "Learning Community" supported, through ICT, which sustains a network of learners. This learning environment has specific features, which promote life long learning (including life skills, employability, citizenship and entrepreneurship) as well as the acquisition of basic skills including literacy, numeracy and IT. The ICT learning environment has also overcome barriers of rural isolation as evidenced with the pilot in Bragança, where people with disabilities are brought into the centre and can access the COESIS portal's (web site) learning resources as well as the internet, reducing their feelings of isolation.

Learning environments must also respect the other needs of learners, such as people with disabilities and provide all the support required. This is why the role of Learning Ambassadors (mediators) within the Portuguese context has been so important. Beneficiaries are guided through their learning with the help of Learning Ambassadors while their social and health needs are met through the support provided by Social Ambassadors.

Due to the differing national perspectives on Learning Environments (some more technological, others more pedagogical, and others even more physical), the transnational theme group decided to follow an approach where specific dimensions were explored. Partners identified synergy between each national approach, and recognized the importance of the end user and their needs, which influenced development. COESIS as the leader of this theme group at transnational level has produced a final report of the results of this group, which is attached at ANNEX F. This includes a set of guidelines for a learning environment.

Learning Ambassadors

Black Country - The aim of this theme group in the Black Country was to develop a formally accredited learning programme for beneficiaries from any one of the Learning Kitchen projects to undertake to become Learning Ambassadors. Learning Ambassadors would be equipped with the skills and tools such as laptops to be able to recruit others from their local communities and their peer groups. The work undertaken by Dudley College clearly identified that no one qualification was suitable to meet every potential Learning Ambassador's needs. As a result they identified possible "pathways" for beneficiaries, which could meet each learners particular aspirations but started with the recognition of what skills they currently had, and which skills needed to be developed. This approach did create tension within the Learning Ambassador theme group where expectations were very different. As a result, Learning Ambassador projects developed more naturally at each project level, some within the formal learning process as described within the Dudley College case study, some in a more informal and non formal environments such as St. Thomas Network, Equal Pathways and the Lighthouse.

As a result of the joint work between Dudley College, St. Thomas Network and the partners from Portugal and Sweden, the concept of a Learning Ambassador just being from the target unemployed and disadvantaged backgrounds changed. The partnership recognised that those already in paid employment, particularly where these people may be working with the target beneficiary group could also become Learning Ambassadors. This "idea" was piloted with the Dudley Muslim Association and proved to be very successful, the group including trainers and a social worker as well as unemployed Muslims. The UK and Portugal produced a job description for a Learning Ambassador, and this is attached at ANNEX G.

KOA - In Sweden there is not the tradition of volunteers and unpaid work. Sweden has examples of paid professionals working as Learning Ambassadors in the open learning centres supporting non-traditional learners to access training through the use of ICT. This concept will support learners within the Open University programme if successful in being implemented. Within the EQUAL project KOA has focused on new open flexible methods for guidance and counselling in the public system and have shared experience of this with all partners at national and transnational levels.

Learning Ambassadors has been difficult to address at transnational level with different cultures and traditions in participating countries. No common purpose was identified for the exchange of experience. Kista Open Academy is interested to pilot a Swedish model of learning ambassadors using volunteers with very small salaries, with associations for ethnic minority groups. KOA has planned and received funding through the extension of the EQUAL project. A pilot will be delivered, evaluated and written up as an action research project. A job description to fit the role in Sweden will be produced. No training curricula or joint transnational training with accreditation has been developed. Learning Ambassadors as part of their final exam within the Institute will describe methodologies used for Teachers School,

Stockholm. This is where the training of guidance counsellors happens

COESIS - The Learning Ambassador (mediator) is a “human development technician”, activity being directed to the promotion of alternative and innovative ways of enabling social and professional inclusion of disadvantaged people, demonstrating the functionality and relevance of the use of ICT. An individual’s participation promotion of interest in learning is an effective strategy in increasing employability and in combating exclusion.

Learning Ambassadors in the COESIS project are paid professionals with relevant degrees, such as psychology. COESIS has developed a training programme and content, which includes social exclusion, mediation, ICT, empowerment and life long learning. The programme has not been accredited and CPRG have stated they will not take this forward. The content has however been validated by the national EQUAL office for inclusion on the EQUAL web site for wider dissemination and valorisation. The training content is located on the COESIS portal.

COESIS partners including the European Anti-Poverty Network see Learning Ambassadors as being proactive rather than reactive. The Learning Ambassador acts as the mediator between the user and their needs and the technology, ensuring all learners can access the portal and all the resources available sign posting them to the appropriate content. Learning ambassadors are also supporting the development of peer support in the ICT workshops, more experienced learners helping those new to the process.

Key features of the Learning Ambassador profile [common to all countries] has being studied in order to build a common framework where the cultural country idiosyncrasies are surpassed. This work has resulted in a job description and personnel specification for a Learning Ambassador. Working with the UK, helped COESIS understand how beneficiaries could become “informal” learning ambassadors, helping their peer group within workshop environments. This was particularly obvious in Braganca, where beneficiaries worked with one another as well as with the Learning Ambassador paid to work with them. (refer to case study below)

C.5. Good practice identified from transnational co-operation

The best practice identified from each of the partner countries has often incorporated activity from all the themes in order to meet the needs of beneficiaries. As a result of this excellent work, which has been shared through the transnational theme groups, some transnational joint working has also been undertaken. It is these case studies, which are being highlighted for sharing as part of this report.

ICT in Communities, good practice from Portugal (a case study)

The COESIS Equal project aimed to develop ICT communities to support disadvantaged people in accessing learning (formal, in formal, and non-formal)

and employment. As a result, working with a private sector IT technical company they developed the COESIS portal. The technicians were asked for a simple system, which would allow anyone with or without IT skills to access the information they needed at that point in their lives. The company believed that this was ambitious, but worked with the partners in the COESIS project to interface their pedagogical approach with the technical framework.

The basis of this development was the belief that the interest in ICT would bring people into learning, and that ICT was indeed a “hook”. Interviews with beneficiaries in three of the centres where the portal can be accessed has confirmed that this is correct. Beneficiaries from a variety of backgrounds said that they preferred to learn and access employment using the portal and ICT to traditional methodologies. Reasons given included:

- accessibility through drop in,
- being able to interact with others in the centre with similar experiences and backgrounds,
- using e mail to communicate with friends, family and colleagues also using the portal,
- accessing so much information which helps with their lives on a personal basis as well as in terms of training and employment.

ICT has reduced the isolation felt by many of these learners whether they are from the industrial centre of Oporto, or the rural area of Bragança. One beneficiary from Bragança, a man who had been injured at work and is now wheelchair bound stated that the portal had helped him live again. He has a personal interest in wildlife and nature and access to the portal and the internet has opened up a new world for him. He also said he felt useful again, as he could help others at the centre less able than him to use the portal. He was also interested in being able to share his love of the environment and wildlife with others.

Isabelle, also using the portal in Bragança suffers from cerebral palsy. She is independent at home but still needs parental support. Isabelle would love to attend the ICT centre in Bragança more regularly, as would most of the beneficiaries. Logistics in an extremely rural area, where the villages are isolated from Bragança relies on the ASCUDT, the provider to use a minibus to bring beneficiaries in from these villages, which are located in the mountains. The centre for her opens up a world, which she would never otherwise be able to experience. When not in the centre she is confined to the house.

Another beneficiary from Bragança had been a hairdresser, but with an illness leaving her with visual impairment is now not able to work in this profession. The centre gives her an opportunity to continue learning, develop new skills including ICT but also empowers her to help others at the centre.

All the beneficiaries believe that the support of the Learning Ambassadors in the centres on Oporto and Bragança are important in enabling them to access the portal and develop new skills. It is obvious from the evaluation visits how close relationships are between the learners and the Learning Ambassadors. A

psychology under graduate on placement at the CPRG centre in Vila Gaia stated that the experience of what she has seen has made her reflect on how she had previously thought about people with disabilities, which was the area of special interest she was studying. She now understood that it was more important to see the person rather than the disability, and the portal had shown how people with disabilities could learn and progress

The COESIS partnership has worked closely with the Swedish partners to explore ways of creating a common standard for the development of e learning content. Sadly, the project finished earlier than in the UK and Sweden, so this joint development could not continue. The partnership has bid into the European Commission for further funding to develop more content, and if approved could help take this partnership forward. (project not approved)

The importance of the right Learning Environment – good practice from the UK Capturing the Past (a case study)

Capturing the Past is a Walsall MBC Libraries and Local History Centre project. It is based in branch libraries in the more deprived wards of Walsall.

Capturing the Past uses local, community and family history themes to encourage adults to use library computers. Courses offered are:

- Get Started
- Research your family Online
- Local Studies
- A trip down Memory Lane

All beneficiaries have the opportunity to share their memories by contributing articles for publication on the project web pages – www.walsall.gov.uk/capturing-the-past

The project employs a manager/tutor who works in libraries 4 days each week. The beneficiaries are offered individual or small group sessions according to their needs, the manager or tutor acts as a learning ambassador

The project focus is the Engagement and Motivation of adult learners (under 64 years) who lack confidence or are unfamiliar with using computers.

Engagement and Motivation is achieved through:

- the project content, which uses e learning for access
- the use of community venues which are welcoming, non-formal and open to all
- the flexibility of session locations, times, dates, frequency
- the opportunity to choose individual or small group sessions

Project beneficiaries include adults with family and carer responsibilities and people with emotional and health needs, most of whom are unable to attend courses at a regular time each week. The project is actively non-judgemental

about beneficiaries who fail to attend and they will be contacted to rearrange a new session time. The project is also reaching some adults who have previously dropped out of more formal courses. Capturing the Past is marketed through the library service as a follow-on opportunity after computer taster sessions and also as a course for people who require individual learning support. Project beneficiaries who are researching their family tree initially had a white or European heritage. The project also engaged a group of ladies with Asian and Black African heritage who were working to record their memories of childhood and family customs.

The Project Content – focussed on Engagement and Motivation offered:

The opportunity to research a family tree. Many people say, “I’ve always wanted to do this, but I don’t know where to start”. Some adults want to research and record the past for the benefit of younger generations.

The opportunity to impart local or community knowledge and memories; firstly through conversation, and later using IT. It is often necessary to spend some time listening to reminiscences before someone will agree to become involved in computer work.

The opportunity to be the expert. Some beneficiaries have a low self-esteem (“my memories are not important”). This project changes the dynamics of the learning situation as beneficiaries are the experts in their own past. For beneficiaries with basic skills needs there has to be a great deal of encouragement before they will commit to an IT course that they will find challenging.

Positive reaction from family and friends. Beneficiaries are proud of their research and usually share their discoveries with others. Becoming the family historian confers an increased status from other family members who are interested in the work and want copies. Beneficiaries find the course increases their self-esteem and many do not realise that basic skills needs are also being addressed.

Innovative aspects included:

Changed dynamics of the learning situations – it is the learner who is imparting knowledge about their locality or their family.

Flexibility of sessions, times and days - many beneficiaries do not attend at the same time each week. Beneficiaries are able to attend by themselves or with a partner, relative or friends.

Builds a library and computer habit – participants can continue using the library computers without the tutor. When the courses are finished the library computers are still freely available.

Beneficiaries become learning ambassadors. All have said that they share the results of their family and community research with at least one other

person. In most cases, work is shared with several others. Discussion with one beneficiary revealed that she had shared her research with sixteen family members – one of whom is being encouraged not to be frightened of computers and another is out of work and is being given Internet research tasks by her to give him an interest.

Beneficiaries are aware that it is the computer and Internet that are the tools for their research. The library allows registered users one hour of free computer and Internet use each day. In most cases beneficiaries' session time is extended provided that others are not waiting. The average length of a taught session is one and a half hours. Beneficiaries are encouraged to attend for thirteen sessions.

Issues of Mainstreaming and Empowerment are supported through Work sheets about accessing family history web sites and a proforma for word-processing an autobiography being available as a result of the project. Capturing the Past is a non-formal and first-rung learning opportunity. However, the computer skills learnt by beneficiaries are listed and can be added to a Record of Achievement. Beneficiaries completing courses are introduced to appropriate follow on training within libraries and local communities. Links have been developed with an Age Concern Project for over 50s 'Past, Present and Future'.

Capturing the Past develops individual confidence and self-esteem. It has many therapeutic aspects including family bonding (when the beneficiary contacts older family members with whom they have lost touch) and recalling the past (when beneficiaries revisit family relationships and childhood experiences). **The project could be developed for individuals within a community health or social services setting.**

Capturing the Past involved one of their beneficiaries in a transnational meeting as part of their learning, and to share their views within the motivation and engagement transnational theme group as an end user. In addition, resources have been shared with a project in Sweden, which has validated the approach working across different countries. This approach is also something, which the COESIS partnership has agreed could be integrated into their portal, and may of interest to their learners.

Meeting User Needs through appropriate Learning Environments a case study from Wolverhampton – Equal Pathways

The Wolverhampton Equal Project targets adults who have suffered a head injury, stroke or other disability. Traditionally in Wolverhampton there would not have been the support needed by these clients to access training or return to work programmes because of their diverse and complex problems.

Multi-agency partnership working across the Black Country has overcome this. Close working relationships have developed with organisations across the Black Country including GATE, Jobcentre Plus, Benefits agencies, Shaw Trust,

Remploy, and Wolverhampton College as well as between Wolverhampton Primary Care Trust and Work Able, a voluntary organisation.

Following assessment clients are directed to a variety of training providers and support agencies depending on their individual needs. A number of private and public organisations have offered and provided work placements. This project has worked to break down discriminatory practice across the Black Country so learners are able to access both training including ICT but also employability skills, and employment. Beneficiaries are supported in meeting their employment goals through regular reviews with staff working on the project.

Interviews with individual beneficiaries identified a number of key factors:

- ✓ All the beneficiaries had been under hospital care and support for a long period of time prior to starting the programme “equal pathways” which takes place at the Wolverhampton Disability Support Centre premises. Some beneficiaries had benefited from a positive experience at the hospital they had attended; some had not had such a positive experience. All the beneficiaries felt that moving away from the hospital environment, which they associated with their ill health and disability as well as their much-needed “medical” support, to a new programme in a new environment was a positive move forward. Moving to a new physical environment was representative of them “moving on” with their lives, heading back to normality and a new future. Therefore in this respect, the new learning environment at the Disability Support Centre was not just a “physical” move, but a psychological move away from what had happened to them with their illness. Quotes provided by beneficiaries in regard to how they felt about what had happened to them included:
 - “I have been to hell and back, and I have no intention of going back to hell”
 - “until I came here I was labelled as unemployable”
 - “coming here makes me feel good about myself”
 - “this has been a new challenge for me, which has given me the confidence to move on with my life and forget about the past”
- ✓ Accessing the Equal Pathways project in the Disability Support centre has offered real added value for each one of them. This has included support with the provision of transport for all of them through trained, experienced and knowledgeable staff plus possibilities of accessing training to become an access auditor and become self-employed. This totally new environment empowers them in not only receiving support from the Equal Pathways programme, but opens up new horizons with opportunities none had really known had existed. The centre offers specialist support under a single roof and within an “umbrella” disability organisation which recognises their abilities and not their disability.
- ✓ Staff at the centre can be considered as Learning Ambassadors, supporting each beneficiary in meeting their individual needs, and helping them identify their individual learning pathways

- ✓ All the beneficiaries stated that they felt safe, secure and “at home” in this new environment. It was not overpowering by being too big, with too many people, which was threatening for them as they still suffered from physical weaknesses which in crowded environments made them lose confidence in their own abilities. This with the one to one support offered through the Equal Pathways programme and by the Disability Support Centre has resulted in all beneficiaries gaining confidence and being able to take the next steps.

Some beneficiaries are themselves becoming Learning Ambassadors, motivated and empowered as a result of this project. One such beneficiary, Kevin Downs has also participated in transnational meetings. He has also participated in working groups, which have resulted in successful beneficiary events in the Black Country and in Brussels. He is currently setting up his own project to support other people like himself, who are recovering from an accident or an illness, which has changed the direction of their lives.

Although Sweden did not initially receive funding for piloting, they did receive approval in the last six months to run a pilot Learning Ambassador project with their ethnic community organisations. In many ways this delay in receiving the funding has proved to be an advantage, in that it has allowed the Swedish partners to observe activities in the Black Country and in Portugal. As a result, the Swedish model has adopted learning from both countries, which is exactly what EQUAL has been about.

Learning Ambassadors in Sweden, a case study

KOA's main goal was to try to adopt a “Learning Ambassadors” programme, based on methods used in partnerships in the UK and Portugal. KOA received an extension of their project to increase the dissemination and to undertake a pilot project within in the local partner immigrant associations all wishing to implement a Learning Ambassadors programme. There are four associations as members within in the local development partnership. They are:

Iranian Association, Stockholm County
The Co-operation Group for Iranian Associations in Sweden (IFR)
The Eritrean Association, Kista/Husby
The Kurdish National Association

The main target groups for the Learning Ambassadors are the members in the associations and the task was to find out if it was possible to develop a Swedish methodology for a Learning Ambassadors programme which could be adapted to meet the needs of these target groups.

Each group received 6500 euros to cover their costs and to be able to pay a small fee to the person they chose to do the job of a Learning Ambassador. The ambassadors received one day of education and training supported with a guidance councillor.

The first learning experience was that the demands and prerequisites in the target groups were very different resulting in all the associations being free to create their own model. Each model is described below:

The Iranian Association, Stockholm County, was a very divided organisation. Their members were not so highly educated and many of them were unemployed. A large group were also young people, the second generation in Sweden of which many had already dropped out of school and were now in difficult circumstances within the labour market. This organisation were not able to fulfil the complete task but just undertook the first steps to inform and build up a network between all the partners within their organisation.

The Cooperation Group for Iranian Associations in Sweden (IFR) started up very quickly. They contacted the labour market office for unemployed people and got support and will now add their money to money from this office. This is an excellent example of how an organisation can be empowered to draw down additional funds from the investment of an initial small sum. They have one person employed full time. The members are highly educated and their difficulties are around the levels of their employment. Many of their highly educated members are driving taxis or running pizzerias. They have worked hard to match the right people into the right work and to find possibilities for complementary education and training which will give them good better opportunities. They have also worked to find possibilities for work experience. This project has translated useful information, arranged to open a radio broadcasting centre where members can call them and get answers to their questions and have arranged meetings in their office where they also have courses and other related activities.

The Eritrean Association, Kista/Husby, has been very ambitious with their plans. They have translated a lot of relevant material and have arranged many meetings in their office where they have also arranged other related activities.

The demands of the group have been very different from the others. With high rates of unemployment they are isolated from all aspects of society. To be able to take the first steps back into a world of education and training their members needed a lot of life skills development and access to relevant information. These demands have been met by the Learning Ambassador and through inviting representatives from local authorities (e.g. the local social department), and tax experts to provide necessary knowledge in these areas. They have also invited representatives from basic skills training organisations and guidance councillors. They have very practically supported families with difficult social problems (e.g. drug problems with their young people) and they have made a great success of their work. They have also opened a radio broadcasting station.

The Kurdish National Association also has a divided structure, which makes it more difficult to develop a model, which will work on the agreed conditions. The project has still not written the final report and we don't know the result.

This is the situation at the end of the pilot projects. KOA has at least two really interesting and successful results where many people have been involved, been hooked into learning and training and received support and more knowledge for their future. There are ideas that can be developed further and may be KOA can find and further develop an adapted model a divided for Swedish Learning Ambassadors. KOA is awaiting the final reports from each association, which will then be analysed, reviewed and the results evaluated. The final results will be disseminated into the local municipalities.

Influencing Policy

As the external evaluation has identified, one of EQUAL's key aims has been to influence policy within education and training as a result of the evaluation of successful pilot initiatives. This area of activity in EQUAL 1 has not been as successful as originally intended. However, within Learning Virtual Sauna, as a result of what was initially seen as a misfortune as a result of the reduction of funding, Kista Open Academy were forced down the route of putting their whole emphasis within their project on networking and lobbying. KOA needed to persuade the "powers" within education and training in Sweden to reduce the barriers faced by disadvantaged adults in accessing higher education, using the excellent Finnish model of an Open University as a baseline, and being introduced the UK Open University as part of this transnational partnership.

KOA and hearings one and two, a case study on "influencing policy"

Kista Open Academy's main aim has been to realise an Open University, through the development of a strong network of change agents in Sweden. To be able to start the process KOA has been building networks with key stakeholders from universities, learning centres, local municipalities, and government identifying the barriers and obstacles within adult learning structures. KOA has also produced and delivered a dissemination strategy involving major policy and decision-making organisations and actors responsible for this area of work.

A major part of this strategy has been to invite a broad range of people from universities and authorities to two "Hearings". The first one had the theme: "The collaboration between universities and the society" and the second: "An Open University for all adults"

The main target group for the first Hearing was the universities and it was a success. Some of the Universities and Colleges presented their excellent collaboration and it showed the possibilities and also the obstacles and the barriers faced by non traditional adult learners, which KOA had already identified within their EQUAL partnership.

The main target groups for the second Hearing were the national authorities and politicians and KOA was fortunate to be able to involve in this hearing key dignitaries.

Aims & Objectives of the dissemination group

The transnational co-operation agreement identified the following aim:

6. Lead Partner - Sweden
Dissemination All partners will produce a dissemination strategy with an approach that is designed to bring together policy makers and practitioners .
Attendance at seminars and conferences
Attendance at fairs
Papers / Reports
Web-site – home page
Reports to EU information papers.

Problems identified and to be overcome:

- To disseminate the results and influence politicians and decision makers and also the target groups
- To create a web-site - home page
- To be responsible for reports to be disseminated
- To arrange seminars, attendance at fairs/exhibitions etc
- To create information and reports to EU

This group has been responsible for all common dissemination activities such as seminars, workshops and reports. The home-page was created immediately (together with End User Requirements) at the start of the project and all the reports from each country and theme group were published on it.

Objectives

1. To promote dissemination at all levels
2. To arrange seminars and meetings for dissemination
3. To support the theme group leaders in their job of disseminating their results and experiences from their own activities
4. To collect the reports from each country and to produce the reports for the EU
5. Share experiences, benchmark and compare national experiences of dissemination and observation as well as best practice from within the transnational partnership
6. Encourage and support joint working between each dissemination activity to encourage the partners where there are common experiences which can be further developed.

What needed to be produced

- A dissemination plan, which was written and then further amended; the first version was produced at the start and then an updated version produced by the end of the project.
- Reports to be published on the homepage showing progress and results to date. This could include leaflets, and the aim was to influence politicians and decision makers to change rules in order to support the specified target groups in their aim to access life long learning
- Reports to EU-authorities and together with theme group leaders produce material to influence politicians and decision makers at seminars and in direct contact with them
- Dissemination of the project results to all the partners and stakeholders at national level

Achievements and Outcomes

Seminars and meetings and exchange of good practice regarding dissemination

- Portugal: Two management meetings and one seminar with workshops and study visits
- UK: Four management meetings and three seminars with workshops and study visits
- SE: Three management meetings and three seminars, one at national level. All with workshops and two with study visits
- FIN: One management meeting and one seminar with workshops

All the seminars were appreciated by the project participants and by other delegates. In all the seminars politicians and target group representatives attended. Beneficiaries from the projects also participated in some of the seminars and workshops, which very effective for dissemination purposes. Listening to the “end user” often has more impact then listening to the providers.

The seminars were always available for the theme groups to present their results and experiences. Many interesting key-note speakers relevant to the theme for the particular seminar were invited to speak and answer questions from the audience. The exchange of methodology and pedagogical issues, identification of differences, similarities as well as experience of learning concepts were explored; topics such as open and flexible lifelong learning, alternative learning, learning customised for target groups and client orientated learning were discussed.

Home page linked to workgroups and dissemination

A homepage was produced and all the reports were published on this homepage.

Dissemination has been a continuous process and included within every transnational seminar and through reports and seminars delivered at national as well as transnational levels.

Reports have been produced in time by all **the partner** countries and have been disseminated within theme and other working groups as well as published on the homepage. Reports have been sent in to the relevant authorities in each partner country.

Results from the dissemination process.

1. The Black Country Knowledge Society has been of special interest to the Swedish authorities. The Black Country vision and the collaboration between different activities within a common framework is a very good model for mainstreaming and dissemination, particularly effective to fulfil the dissemination requirement but more importantly influence at political level.
2. The diversity and number of different projects within a partnership such as that in the UK has facilitated the dissemination much better than an organisation with single partner. (There have been other difficulties as a result of this though) It is seen as effective and will increase the opportunities for better dissemination within the target groups.

In some ways Sweden has adopted UK-ideas in dissemination in terms of influencing the political level in order to make changes in the Swedish system for access to higher education for adults and for the development of an open-university. Sweden has made commitments with strong Swedish organisations and these are now collaborating together in the dissemination of results and ideas.

Dissemination materials produced to influence politicians and decision makers at seminars and through direct contact.

All the partner countries produced leaflets and brochures to support dissemination. Documentation and reports from the seminars has also been produced and disseminated.

Internal evaluation and recommendations from the dissemination working group.

The work related to dissemination has been very easy aspect in terms of transnational collaboration. All those responsible took this as a serious aspect of the project and the results and experiences have been disseminated in all three partner countries. In regard to Finland which left their membership as an associated partner to Learning Kitchen so as result only some of their

knowledge and expertise was embedded. The exchange of experience and methods used for dissemination enriched the transnational collaboration.

C. 7. Learning Virtual Sauna – barriers and issues within transnational collaboration

The partnership immediately identified two problems for the transnational partnership.

- The Portuguese partners were completing their transnational participation in September 2004, and the Swedish partners in December 2004, although the latter was finally extended in Sweden to May 2005 in line with the UK.
- Differing levels of funding for each transnational partnership, Portugal 60,000 euros, Sweden 340,000 euros and the UK 466,600 euros, (although the UK's budget was cut back to a much lower figure)
- Sweden, as a result of not having beneficiaries, was an issue. As a result, KOA tried to introduce existing Swedish good practice into the transnational work, so that projects from Portugal and the UK could find some common links.

These issues had to be immediately addressed in the planning process, which was why only one meeting took place in Portugal, with more meetings in Sweden and the UK. Portugal was able to attend the meeting in Sweden in September 2004, but not the two further meetings in the UK in March 2005, or Sweden in May 2005.

The external evaluation process has been useful in helping to identify the key issues each of the partners had as a result of the transnational co-operation. These are taken from the external evaluation report and summarised below:

- A major barrier for both Sweden and the UK, was the lack of clean cash match funding from both countries. Both partnerships depended on “match funding in kind”, which has effectively reduced the investment into the projects at national level as well as transnational levels, to 50%. As a result, neither country could appoint staff to work full time on the EQUAL projects, and particularly at transnational level. Both Development Partnerships felt, that such initiatives, which clearly meet national policy and strategies, should receive match from the relevant public authorities. This is what happened in Portugal.
- Differing levels of expertise within the partnership in working at transnational level, certainly delayed the implementation of real joint activity. Learning Kitchen had no experience of this, which left them not really fully understanding what was required from them as a partnership. Too much time in the first 18 months was spent in meetings, which had no real focus, plan or identified outcomes to be achieved. This, with very little work and co-ordination outside of the transnational meetings, has resulted in very little joint activity between the partners.

- The external evaluation has stated that the transnational co-operation agreement was far too ambitious for a partnership, which had not worked together before as a transnational partnership. This with the lack of real understanding of transnationality, little active planning, few available resources at transnational level and weakness in overall transnational co-ordination has resulted in not all the deliverables being achieved.
- Lack of leadership and management has been a crucial weakness, in not being able to deliver more at transnational level to fulfil the Transnational Co-operation Agreement.
- The lack of partnership activity in between transnational conferences was a real weakness. Not having someone paid, on behalf of all the transnational partners, to work solely on the transnational activity has been an issue, particularly in Sweden and the UK, where many of the project staff, also had full time jobs back in their own organisations.
- The cAme web site/database was set up to encourage greater interaction between each of the partners and provide an opportunity to share reports and resources. However, even though UK reports and a mid term evaluation was placed on the web site. Access to the web site and database was provided to everybody. Some persons were unable to access and utilise the facility.
- It was suggested/recommended that staff and beneficiary exchanges be introduced. However, there appeared to be a lack of knowledge regarding the financial budget situation for Learning Kitchen, so this initiative never saw the light.
- It was also a general feeling that most of the transnational conferences over the three years involved many hours of listening to 'academic' lectures rather than visiting local projects and talking to project managers about their work. Participants' overall impression was that this was lost opportunity to gain an insight into the work being carried out transnationally, and opportunity to develop joint projects and resources.
- The same has been stated about the two UK "transnational" conferences, in that rather than the three days being given to EQUAL, the conference was "badged" under the 'Black Country Knowledge Society' (BCKS). The second conference in the UK had addressed the feedback from the first, but the emphasis was still on the work of the knowledge society, and very little towards supporting the mainstreaming of the learning from EQUAL. This was confusing for some of the transnational partners. Some of the Learning Kitchen projects felt that the conferences were organised to promote BCKS rather than the EQUAL project. It was organised to serve the interests of the Black Country Consortium and dignitaries as opposed to EQUAL stakeholders, beneficiaries and for those at the 'coalface' who had made EQUAL successful in the Black Country.

- Another disappointing aspect of transnational working was the Learning Kitchen policy of inviting the same personnel from the projects to each conference. This resulted in many from the projects not having the opportunity to experience the partnership working. The reason for this was the way transnational meetings tried to deal with both project management and theme development work, as well as study visit type activity and attendance at conference. The study visits should have been kept separate, and could have been used as the vehicle for more project staff participating and developing bilateral joint activity, which would have offered real added value to the total transnational co-operation. As far as beneficiaries were concerned, a total of three were invited to conferences in Portugal and Sweden. Managers appreciated the desire to keep the same personnel for continuity purposes, but the policy deliberately excluded many of whom, would have benefited from the experience.
- From the Swedish perspective, the most difficult aspect has been the constant changes in staff from the UK and Portugal in terms of attendance at project management and theme development working groups, as a result of staff turnover. This has impacted in a negative way on the deliverables of each of the transnational theme groups. This was recognised as an issue by both the UK and Portugal.
- Language has also been identified as a barrier for communications, both at the transnational meetings, but also outside of the meetings. Interpretation was not made available during meeting sessions, as it was not requested, but with hindsight may have been useful for some participants on some occasions.

D Conclusions

This report has identified what has happened at transnational level and what has been achieved. The external evaluation report for Learning Virtual Sauna has helped to identify where transnational collaboration has impacted at national level, but more importantly identified potential for future joint activity. Both reports identify best practice but also recognise where weaknesses within the collaboration exist and could be improved for the future.

All the Learning Virtual Sauna partners recognise that the partnership has not been as effective as it could have been, for the reasons described in section C 7, which were identified through the external evaluation process. However, there has been much learning within the partnership by each of the organisations and this report has identified this. As with so many such collaborations, all the partners would accept that the greatest learning has been for those individuals who have participated in the transnational activities, and included beneficiaries. The study visits, which took place were particularly welcomed.

There has been some real sharing of knowledge, ideas, experience and skills within the partnership, and recognition of how processes for transnational collaboration could be improved in the future. Stronger leadership and co-

ordination of the overall delivery of the transnational co-operation agreement has been identified as a real need, supported by more effective communications both within the transnational activity and more importantly in between. The external evaluator has suggested that the co-operation agreement was unrealistic and over ambitious for the partnership and this has been recognised as a major piece of learning. As a new partnership, the overall aims and objectives were over ambitious, providing what EQUAL wanted to see rather than what could be effectively delivered. All the partners within the Learning Virtual Sauna Network would accept the recommendations made by the external evaluator in the final evaluation report.

However there is a lasting relationship between the partners, as Rashid Chowdry from KOA has stated at a number of the transnational meetings:

“this project has created an extended family of friends, and the journey has only just started”.

The Black Country partnership will certainly be using all this learning in the development and delivery of their EQUAL 2 project.

D. Recommendations

To approve this report.