

I³ EU Leonardo da Vinci Project

Interim Evaluation Report One: The I³Partnership

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I would like to thank the representatives from the seven partner organisations who completed this questionnaire.

*Jane Field
Education and Development
September 2003*

Context

I³

The I³ project, funded under the EU Leonardo da Vinci programme, started in December 2002, and will finish in December 2004. The primary aim of I³ is to develop a multimedia training resource for the personnel of business incubators and business innovation centres (BICs), in order to enhance their business performance. The key target group is primarily personnel of incubators and BICs; although the Project will indirectly benefit firms assisted by these agents.

Project Partners

There are eight project partners from six countries:

- Two European organisations, the European Business and Innovation Centre Network (EBN) & the European Business Angels Network (EBAN);
- A leading international business school - Instituto de Empresa (IdE), Madrid;
- An Irish Business and Innovation Centre – WESTBIC (lead partner);
- A Lithuanian incubator and BIC - Kaunas University of Technology (KTC);
- A UK Local Enterprise Agency - Omagh Enterprise Company Ltd (OECL);
- A UK business training provider - Initiative Economic Development (IED);
- A Greek consultancy specialising in the evaluation of European programmes - Atlantis Consulting (AC).

Work Packages

There are seven Work Packages, with one partner bearing lead responsibility for one package.

1. Training Needs Analysis: KTC
Production of an objective list of training requirements for the target group
2. Materials Development: IdE
Based on Phase I, preparation of the training tool content.
3. Technical Realisation: IED
Design and development of web tool
4. Pilot Testing: OECL
Testing of the product among primary and secondary target groups in each participating country, and amendment as required
5. Dissemination / Post-Production Dissemination: EBN & EBAN
Multidirectional dissemination via the established national networks of each partner.
6. Evaluation: AC
Ongoing continuous internal monitoring by all partners, complemented by an external evaluation, focusing on project content and partnership co-operation.
7. Programme Management and Quality Control: WESTBIC
Timetabling, implementation, review of actions and adjustment as required

At the point when the questionnaires were completed the first work package was well underway to completion, and the partners met to discuss outcomes from the first work package

and to plan the second and subsequent packages. Work packages five, six and seven are ongoing.

Project Outputs

Four project outputs have been identified:

1. A comprehensive analysis of the target groups' training requirements, based on input from incubator staff and incubatee companies;
2. A web-based training and information tool including the needs of high growth SMEs, incubator support strategies, best practice studies, database of European incubators/stakeholders and platform for transnational communication;
3. Marketing materials designed to maximise awareness of the tool;
4. A comprehensive assessment of project procedures and outcomes

In early summer 2003, following a tendering process, Education and Development was appointed as the external evaluator to the I³ project. The evaluation proposal outlined a formative evaluation strategy, with a series of interim reports that will contribute to the learning, development and review processes of the project.

This report provides feedback and analysis from the first evaluation questionnaire, issued to the I³ partners during the meeting held in Lithuania in July 2003. It also briefly outlines the evaluation strategy and methodology to be employed.

Evaluation Methodology

The primary purpose of the external evaluation is to examine the extent to which the I³ project meets the objectives laid out in the original application and the workplan agreed by the partners.

Effective evaluation should contribute to the learning process and development of a project rather than simply ticking boxes and informing project management about where the project has “passed” or “failed”. Through the use of a number of evaluation processes the evaluator has the benefit of inside knowledge about all aspects of the work of the project, without being “bogged down” by the day-to-day operations of the project. Thus it is possible to encourage partners, key players and beneficiaries to reflect on what is happening; thereby identifying good practice, enabling strategies and areas of constraint or conflict. Formative evaluation contributes to the learning process not only to the benefit of the project and the partners but also for the benefit of the project funders. In short, the external evaluator might be seen as a “critical friend”.

The evaluation process considers the impact of a project, both for the project team, stakeholders, partners and beneficiaries. The external evaluator will observe and seek opinions on the extent to which objectives and outcomes initially agreed are met during the lifetime of the project. Finally, the external evaluation will look at the added value gained from participation in the project; this may be from the viewpoint of the partners, business incubators and business innovation centres, and other stakeholder organisations.

The evaluation process can support the project, not only in terms of general development, but also through the delivery of interim evaluation reports and the final evaluation report that can be included when formally reporting on the project to the funding body. Evaluation provides an opportunity to reflect on what has been done, recognise achievements, consider and discuss both short-term and longer-term priorities, and ‘brainstorm’ future opportunities and challenges.

The evaluation will look at the following four key areas:

1. Process and experiences in partner co-operation such as completion of tasks on schedule, communication, finance, etc.
2. Products of co-operation such as objectives reached, outcomes as useful as expected, unforeseen results obtained, etc.
3. Possibilities and perspectives of further common project work after completion of project.
4. Added value of the partnership for development at local, regional, and national level.

The outline methodology for each of the four key evaluation objectives is given below:

Process and experiences in partner co-operation such as completion of tasks on schedule, communication, finance, etc.

The evaluation will focus on the project partners: to include telephone interviews, questionnaires and group evaluation exercises at the two partner meetings attended by the external evaluator. Members of the project's Quality Control Consultative Group will also be invited to participate in evaluation activities as appropriate. The internal monitoring reports will also contribute to this element of the evaluation.

Products of co-operation such as objectives reached, outcomes as useful as expected, unforeseen results obtained, etc.

Both project partners and beneficiaries will be involved in this stage of the evaluation process; again through telephone interviews and questionnaires. It is anticipated that questionnaires will be sent by email and can be translated if necessary (note that this has not been costed into the budget, as any such questionnaire would be short and it is hoped that partners can support the translation process). The internal monitoring will also contribute to this element of the evaluation.

Possibilities and perspectives of further common project work after completion of project.

To be achieved through feedback from questionnaires to beneficiaries, a group evaluation exercise with the partners and an internet search of similar or complementary activity and development. Ongoing review of project documentation will also inform this element of the evaluation.

Added value of the partnership for development at local, regional, and national level.

Focus on the project partners: to include telephone interviews, questionnaires to be completed after each partner meeting and group evaluation exercises at the two partner meetings attended by the external evaluator. Individual interviews with the partners (undertaken during the partner meetings attended by the evaluator) will also inform the added value element of the evaluation; which will not only focus on the individual organisations, but also the added value gained through working with a transnational partnership.

Throughout the evaluation process there will be a focus on:

- The extent to which outcomes are achieved
- The extent to which each work package was delivered, in terms of effectiveness, timescales, partner cooperation, good practice and challenges / constraints

- Added value of the project to each of the partners, and ways in which involvement in the project has had an impact on their own strategic planning and development
- The efficiency of the transnational project management and administration
- Transferability of good practice to future transnational projects; and a recognition of challenges and constraints

The evaluation will consider each of the work packages in accordance with the general methodology outlined above; and taking into account the overall focus of the evaluation.

Brief Interim Evaluation Reports will be delivered after each phase of the evaluation, with the aim to provide ongoing feedback to the project, thus supporting the learning and development process. When attending the two partner meetings the evaluator will give short presentations on the highlights of the evaluation to date and also lead group evaluation exercises. Time will also be scheduled during these two partner meetings for individual interviews with all partners. It is anticipated that the project launch will take place coinciding with one of the project meetings, which will be attended by the evaluator. Education and Development will attend this event.

In line with the reporting arrangements required by the Irish National Leonardo Agency the evaluator will provide an Interim and Final Evaluation Report. The main Interim Report will be delivered in February 2004, and the Final Evaluation Report will be delivered in November 2004.

Questionnaire data and analysis

Representatives from seven of the eight project partner organisations completed the questionnaire (see Appendix One). This section of the report provides feedback from the questionnaire responses and some analysis.

Project Development

The first section of the questionnaire addressed issues of project development. The first table asked the partners to rate the development of core project issues.

Table 1: The extent to which project issues have been developed

Project issues	Very well developed	Developing satisfactorily	Developed to some extent	Poorly developed
The purpose of the Project is..	6	1		
The strategy has been..	4	3		
Communication between the Project Coordinator and the partners has been..	4	3		
Communication between the partners has been..	2	5		
Shared values between partners are..	1	6		
The TNA Work Package process has been..		5	2	

The partner's responses indicate that at a relatively early stage in the project many of the core issues are developing well. This table reflects the strengths of the project and gives an indication that this transnational project will develop effectively. Almost all the partners believe that the purpose of the project has been very well developed, which points to a sound proposal that has involved all partners in the development of ideas. This surmise is further supported by the fact that all partners feel that the project strategy and communication between the project coordinator and partners is developing satisfactorily or well developed.

Somewhat less well developed, although seen by all as at least developing satisfactorily, is the communication and shared values between partners. At this stage in the project there is time to further develop inter-partner relationships, both through partner meetings, and when partners are working on similar areas. It is important that sufficient time is given to sharing and communicating ideas and experiences between partners during partner meetings.

The area of greatest concern was the process undertaken on the TNA Work Package; which was the subject of much discussion during the Partnership Meeting in Lithuania in July 2003 (see Interim Evaluation Report Two).

The second question addressing project development asked partners to identify any problems that they have experienced so far whilst working on the I³Project. The question also asked what solution, if any, had been found or if there was a possible solution.

Table 2: Problems experienced to date and solutions identified

Problem	Solution
Slippage re: deadline for TNA tasks resulting in the task package partner not undertaking most of their own work package.	Partners ended up redesigning the questionnaires and effectively designing the desk research template in order to ensure consistency of approach and continuity in terms of the research report.
Financial spreadsheet – no partner wishes to use this system, which requests more information and justification than the National Agency; in many cases it is not compliant with in house practices e.g. many partners do not keep time sheets. Despite repeated and numerous protests this system has been enforced by the lead partner.	Remove this spreadsheet and allow partner organisations to submit their standard, agency compliant reports and claims. All partners, with the exception of the lead partner, have previous Leonardo experience so this should be fully workable and will overcome the additional expense currently incurred by partners in trying to implement and run this new system alongside their current system.
Confirming meetings with BIC Directors – managers for TNA	Possible solution: Sending questionnaires by e-mail
Delay with providing reporting templates	
Delay in getting feedback	Deadlines
Training needs analysis phase – getting responses from SMEs	Persistence
Things are slow to be done – people won't do things until pushed	Put deadlines on tasks to be completed
As coordinator a lack a familiarity with the Leonardo Project tends to slow progress and decisions on certain issues	Regular contact with the National Agency and reference to the Contract and Administration and Financial Handbook
Lots of administration which is time consuming	Don't know - you have to respond to partner queries and responses for feedback

This list identifies the need for deadlines to be put on pieces of work and requests for information. Even so there can be time slippages. One of the keys to successful European and other partner based projects is that everyone keeps to deadlines. This not only keeps projects

on track, but also saves time from the point of view of the Project Coordinator or Work Package leader and demonstrates partner commitment.

Practical solutions have been used, such as redesigning templates to ensure consistency and persistence, or the use of email to get responses from SMEs or other contacts. The Project Coordinator has made valuable contacts with the National Agency, this combined with referring to the Contract and Administration and Financial Handbook is helping to move the project forward. There does appear to be an issue over the financial spreadsheet. As an absolute minimum partners must provide financial and other data required by the EU and National Agency. It might be possible to agree a compromise over the use of the Project financial spreadsheet.

The problems and solutions identified here can be used in Interim or Final Reports to the National Agency (if as in previous reports on Leonardo da Vinci projects a section on problems and solutions is included).

Partners were asked to identify priorities between July 2003 and the next partner meeting; these are shown in the table below.

Table 3: Priorities between July 2003 and January 2004

Priority	No. of responses
Completion of TNA report	6
Development of training Materials	4
Deciding on material / content of training tool	4
Development of a high quality website	2
Progress on Technical Realisation	2
Progress on general dissemination	2
Dissemination of TNA report / project	2
Ensure the monitoring and evaluation process is understood by all and that quality results are delivered	1

Completion of the first work package (identified by six of the seven partners), and dissemination thereof were prioritised. Partners identified working on the second work package as a priority, four partners specifying development of training materials and four specifying the material and content of the training tool.

Developing a good project website, dissemination of both the TNA report and general dissemination was also highlighted; dissemination should take place throughout the project; which is recognised by a number of the partners.

Finally the section on project development asked if partners had any major concerns or worried about the I³ project. Six partners said no; whilst one partner expressed the feeling that

progress is not on schedule although partners have not raised this as an issue, and seem content with progress. The Project Coordinator also expressed personal concern about how the progress of the project would be viewed by the National Agency; however a recent meeting allayed this worry as the National Agency commented favourably on the progress and development of I³.

Expectations and Added Value

Taking into account the primary aim of I³ - ie to develop a multimedia training resource for the personnel of business incubators and business innovation centres (BICs), in order to enhance their business performance – the partners were asked what their expectations were from involvement in the Project.

Table 4: Expectations from I³ project

Partner Expectations
We believe that BI's in our country are in need of new services or improvement of the ones they already offer. We have been involved before in the development of training material for SMEs, and we know a lot about their needs. We thought that combining our experience with the new results would create a good and useful product
Entrepreneurship is enhanced through the improvement of intangible assets – link with BANs and innovation and entrepreneurship
The development of a high quality training course which will be of great value to the target market, ie those who offer business advice to high growth SMEs
A strong interest in all areas related to entrepreneurship but particularly technological innovation and start ups
It directly interacts with the activities of our organisation
As a global enterprise agency we offer business support and workspace to SMEs – however support we provide is limited. Company currently at an advanced stage in the development of a Technology Innovation Centre and relationships developed and expertise gained will be of a great advantage when implementing the TIC
We are a business innovation centre with a mission statement “to identify, incubate and support value-added enterprise opportunities”

The expectations expressed by the partners indicate a high level of interest and commitment to delivering the outputs proposed by the I³ project. Partners will be asked the extent to which their expectations have been met towards the end of the Project.

The questionnaire asked the partners what benefits they thought I³ would gain from being a transnational project, with partners from six countries.

Table 5: Benefits for I³ from the transnational partnership

Benefits from Transnational Partnership
Transnationality of the consortium will safeguard that the results of the TNA will be applicable for many countries and thus, the material developed will also be according to many different needs – so it will cover more areas
Cohesion, best practice and benchmarking
It will enable the development of a product that is useful on a European basis
Transnationality always enriches the project experience. Exchange of experience, Europe-wide raises the level of best practice
The developed training tool will be tailored for several countries and easily adopted for other countries of Europe
Share expertise and knowledge
To develop a tool like this must have international partners in order to address country specific issues. International partners also bring experience to the table

The sharing of knowledge and experience; and the opportunity to develop a tool that is of relevance to a number of countries, and transferable to others; are the most frequently given reasons as to why transnationality benefits the I³Project. Sharing best practice and benchmarking are also noted as benefits from working within a transnational partnership.

The table below shows the responses to the question asked about ‘added value’ that partner organisations hope to gain from participation in the I³ Project.

Table 6: Added value for partners

Hoped for Added Value for Partners gained from participating in I³
Meeting new partners and developing relationships with countries we have never worked with before. Through this project we hope to establish linkages with many organisations from our country as well as from other EU countries
Knowledge of BICs and incubators
European networking; enhanced profile; commercial product
We expect to gain from increased knowledge on the workings of Incubators across Europe, in addition to the experience of developing a multimedia resource / e-learning training programme for a key target audience
Share of experience, wider partnership, further co-operation
Development of new relations with other organisations and increased knowledge / expertise
Development and enhancement of our experience in the area of incubation and enterprise support. New international project and networking opportunities

Networking, creating new links and sharing knowledge are the key issues that the partners identified in terms of added value that they hope to gain from participation in the I³project. This further supports the need for networking time during partner meetings.

Dissemination

It is important that dissemination is considered from the outset of the Project; and continually encouraged as an activity regularly undertaken by all partners. The questionnaire asked what dissemination activity the partners had already engaged in, and what was intended during the next six months.

Table 7: Dissemination activity undertaken and planned

Dissemination Activity	Already undertaken: No. of partners	Planned within the next 6 months: No. of partners
Talked with colleagues in my organisation about I ³	7	
Talked with other professionals (outside of my own organisation) about I ³	7	
Press releases to the local press	5	1
Written a short article about I ³ for a newsletter circulated internally	4	3
Written a short article about I ³ for a newsletter circulated externally	4	2
Included information about I ³ in a presentation or seminar you have given	4	4
Included information about I ³ at an exhibition you have attended	3	5
Posted information about I ³ on own organisation website	2	5
E-zine, feedback from E-zine article and replies to queries	2	3
Brochure / Information sheet	2	3
Participation and presentation of I ³ at EU project dissemination fair which was a part of 8 th international Conference 'Baltic Dynamics 03-Lithuania	1	
Press release	1	3
Promotion of project and product at events		2
Publicise results of the TNA at national and European level		1
Dissemination to local potential beneficiaries		1
Organise information days		1
Expand organisation's dissemination database		1

Considerable dissemination activity has already taken place; and the partners obviously intend to continue to maintain good levels of dissemination. It is important that records of these dissemination activities are maintained and collated by the Project Coordinator.

Partners were asked what information should be included on the I³ website.

Table 8: Website information

Information that could be displayed on the I³Website	No. of responses
Partner information (with links to own websites)	4
Purpose of project	3
General information	2
Information on the Leonardo da Vinci programme / EU policy	1
Project detail	1
TNA results	1
Information on materials development	1
Strategy concerning incubation	1
Overall information for each country	1
Business development plan	1
Finance (including technology and innovation management)	1
Marketing	1

Given that all too often one partner ends up taking on writing all the content for a Project website, the partners were asked what information their organisation could contribute to the I³ website.

Table 9: Potential partner contributions to the Project Website

Information that Partners Could Contribute to the Website	No. of responses
Partner information (with links to own websites)	1
Information on the Leonardo da Vinci programme	1
Project detail	1
Country specific information (legislation / strategy / existing situation)	1
Feedback from users / potential beneficiaries	1
Pilot testing	1
Company information – details on our phase	1
Link to own website	1
Business development plan	1
Finance (including technology and innovation management)	1
Marketing	1

It is recommended that the website editor follows up on this list. The partners also need to agree on the main aims and key content of the I³ website.

Finally

Partners were invited to add any additional comments, which are recorded below:

- Good progress
- It is important to identify what would be more efficient in terms of meeting BI staff / managers needs in improving their services – using training materials or just information provision
- Partners working well together
- Outputs being achieved

Commentary

The final section of this report offers a brief commentary and a series of recommendations.

The I³ Project appears to be well thought through, with all partners in agreement with the purpose; which fits in well with the work of their own organisations. This implies that the partners were well identified prior to the start of the Project, and that the partnership has every likelihood of working well.

Partnership building

In order to support communication between partners sufficient time should be given to sharing ideas and experiences during partner meetings. One of the positive spin-offs and added value gained from European funded projects is when transnational partners find that they have areas in common that they can further develop through partnership in the future. This was implied in the responses partners gave to the added value they hoped to gain through participation in the Project.

Deadlines

As identified in the problems / solutions question; one of the biggest problems is partners keeping to agreed deadlines. It is also an accepted part of involvement in any project that this work can be in addition to existing workloads, and organisations commonly do not allocate sufficient staff-time to project work. However, given the commitment of the partners to the purpose of the project, the work to be completed as part of the project (payment is obviously based on tasks being completed), and the fact that the outputs should benefit the organisations involved this should provide an added incentive to meet project deadlines and carry out the work agreed within the timescale agreed. Experience shows that partners tend to do a lot of work on a project in the weeks prior to a partner meeting, and sometimes in the week or two immediately following a partner meeting. As such, maybe deadlines should be made within these periods where possible, although this does place added pressure on partners to ensure that work is completed prior to the meeting such that the whole project can move forward.

Record keeping

The Project Coordinator should review the financial spreadsheet and consider whether it is possible to reach a compromise on this; such that all required financial data is captured, without incurring frustration or considerable administrative input. Regular collection and collation of financial data is recommended, as this will make the final project reporting considerably easier.

Dissemination

It is good practice for dissemination to take place throughout the project, and for partners to systematically record all dissemination events; including published materials, written articles, workshops, input at conferences and visits to discuss the project. If a template has not already been drawn up for completion by partners about dissemination activity it is recommended that this be done. Ideally copies of written dissemination activity should be sent to the Project Coordinator. There may also be benefit from sharing written articles with partners as they may be in a position to produce something similar in their own country.

The partners need to agree on the main aims and key content of the I³ website. The section above lists the information that partners can contribute to the website, which should be followed up by the website editor.

Dissemination can be seen as pro-active or passive; for example, a visit to discuss the project materials with one or two people involves those individuals in pro-actively understanding and talking about the project; those participating in workshops, particularly when they are encouraged to participate in an activity are proactively becoming involved. Conversely, written materials and to a lesser extent websites involve the recipient at a more passive level. As such it is important to include and credit individual visits in dissemination activity, as well as those dissemination activities more commonly highlighted. It would also be worth considering whether there are other European networks or other Leonardo da Vinci Projects and partnerships that would be interested in information about the I³ Project.

Appendix One
Questionnaire Respondents

Name:	Organisation:
Tomas Cernevicius	KTC
Damvakeraki, Tonia	Atlantis Consulting S.A
Faherty, Ultan	WESTBIC
McCausland, Julie	Omach Enterprise Company
Munck, Claire	EBAN
Rayney, Beth	Institute de Empresa
Treanor, Lorna	Initiative Economic Development