ETF - European Training Foundation

LEARN Project Evaluation
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<u>Final Evaluation Report</u>

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Table of contents

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During the intensive agenda of field meetings throughout five countries of South East Europe between 4th and 21st September 2011, essential background information, advices and documents were readily provided by project actors and external stakeholders alike. The consulting team expresses its gratitude to all those who kindly gave their time and contribution.

DISCLAIMER

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1. Executive Summary

1.1. Background

The ETF LEARN project has been implemented between 2007 and 2009 in seven countries of South Eastern Europe (SEE), with the overall objective to contribute to the national capacities for VET policy formulation and implementation by strengthening the professional expertise of the recently established VET Centres, or their functional equivalents. To tackle underlying challenges such as supporting the development of VET teachers training and nurturing policy learning - which had been severely undermined by previous centralised planning followed by a decade of regional conflict and economic collapse -, the project approach was based e.g. on the innovative concept of 'Community of Practice' (CoP). In so doing, LEARN benefited from a VET teachers' training (TT) network which had been established by ETF in the region since 2002.

The objective of this evaluation concerned the overall assessment of the LEARN project, although the scope of the assessment was more specifically focused on a set of seven evaluation questions, which have been used as the chapters headlines in the section 4 of this report, dedicated to findings, as well as in the chapter 1.3 below. The Terms of Reference (ToR) of the evaluation can be found in Annex E.

1.2. Methodology

After a desk review phase followed by a briefing at ETF and an inception report, the field visits were carried out from 4th until 21st of September by a team of three consultants. The visits covered successively the five countries which had been designated in the ToR: Albania, Montenegro, fYR of Macedonia (Macedonia), Serbia and Bosnia i Herzegovina (BiH).Key project actors in the three remaining countries (Croatia, Kosovo and Turkey) were contacted separately.

The methods for collection and analysis of findings were consistent with those proposed in the tentative work plan of the inception report. A Matrix (the key evaluation tool, see Annex B) was defined, which integrated the evaluation questions - revised during the inception phase - together with relevant criteria and indicators; the ToR required the use of five OECD/DAC evaluation criteria (relevance, efficiency, effectiveness, impact and sustainability), and also the assessment of the added value of the LEARN project. The Matrix was complemented by a work plan which indicated the intended visits, for each travel day. On that basis the evaluators have carried out individual meetings with directors and school principals, often combined with workshops that involved other concerned staff and teachers, as well as focus discussions with external stakeholders.

In every country, the evaluation team has been able to meet most of the key actors and stakeholders who had been mentioned in the project documents (reports, publications) and some attendants to relevant seminars that had been organised after the end of LEARN. It should be noted that a potential constraint, common to ex-post evaluations, i.e. the turnover of 'institutional memories' after the end of the project, did not materialise in this case. Most of the actors involved in the project between 2007 and 2009 were still in place,

or working in a different position in the same organization. This situation has generally allowed the 'triangulation' of the findings, necessary to define patterns and conclusions. A list of the persons who have been interviewed is attached in Annex C.

1.3. Main Findings

Contributions to the reform process of VET teachers training

Pre-service training for teachers and trainers employed in VET schools is not provided in any of the five countries. Many teachers emphasized that inputs from external donors, e.g. the LEARN project have given rise to increased awareness of the need to focus on VET teacher competence development.

Several stakeholders representing VET schools and governmental VET representatives highlighted that ETF impact on VET teacher training was noticeable at the policy level, when platforms for exchange of good practices were provided and functioning. When implemented according to plans, the small country/innovative school projects provided much inspiration and inputs in terms of bringing teacher competence development into focus.

The impact of the Project-Based Learning (PBL) school project in Albania was particularly remarkable, and spin-offs including e.g. training materials were disseminated and utilised to a great extent.

A. Collective competence development at school level

Nearly every actor and stakeholder highlighted that collective development at school level is an urgent need, and that ETF and the LEARN project have had an impact on how the concerned schools have seen themselves in this process, especially in terms of taking initiatives without awaiting for approval or directives from the central level. The positive attitude to the school projects did also include a large majority of teachers in the concerned schools, even where the expected outcomes have not been achieved, for various reasons.

It was also regularly stressed that the LEARN project has followed a flexible networking approach, in the framework of which participants were given the opportunity to discuss openly and freely VET policy reforms. This relaxed atmosphere was a clear added value and contrasted with the top-down approach of some larger EU-funded programmes. It has significantly contributed to the eagerness expressed by all the schools visited to continue cooperating with ETF, despite the perceived limited resources of the projects.

B. VET Centres as anchors for Policy Learning

The effectiveness of all the visited VET Centres is still undermined to a certain (although much varying) extent by a number of shortages and constraints, e.g. the lack of financial and human resources and the subordination to the Ministry of Education (MoE, and sometimes to other government organisations as well) in terms of self-governance and political authority.

As a rule, the key issue of professional development of VET teachers is not (for the moment) included in the scope of authority of the VET Centres. This task is usually left to the Pedagogical Institute, which is set up and governed by MoE.

It was however remarkable that the status and capacities of the VET Centres could appear so widely different among the countries visited, in direct relation to e.g. the political stability (turnover at the MoE, accountability) or the appropriateness of the legal status of the Centre. Such factors had a direct impact on how much the VET Centre could be involved in the planned ETF activities and hence on the outcome of these interventions. The directors and concerned
staff of the Centres in Albania and Montenegro, the two best functioning bodies, commended the support obtained from the LEARN project. At the opposite, the VET Centre in Macedonia did not appear to have retained any institutional knowledge of the project.

C. Web based Communities of Practice (CoP)

Where the small country school projects have been implemented in accordance (as much as feasible) with their ToR and have been provided with the required support from the VET Centres and other relevant authorities, the CoP has demonstrated its capacity to nurture and strengthen learning processes. The school projects in Albania have e.g. showed how the social learning theory can be successfully applied inside and among organisations in a specific domain. In this case the CoP has lingered on after the completion of the LEARN project, which is a clear indication of a sustainable learning approach.

In Montenegro, CoP activities have continued in the framework of a further ETF project focusing on school-based models for teacher training within key competences, in selected pilot schools. It should be noted that this 'new' CoP is carried out in a close cooperation between the VET Centre and the Bureau for Educational Services. This cooperation was not in place during the LEARN E-portfolio project and may have been one of the reasons for the problems encountered in its implementation.

The majority of the stakeholders dealing with VET policy formulation and implementation, have emphasized that the various workshops/courses/seminars and the direct networking with VET actors from other countries had made a strong contribution to their own professional capacity, as well as to their understanding of VET implementation and policy.

A number of obstacles and constraints to networking at school level were however also regularly outlined which should be considered as lessons learnt for future projects, such as a lack of IT and English proficiency, poor access to the internet, or the novelty of the CoP concept (especially web based). The networking took place essentially during 'physical' meetings at seminars and workshops, rather than on the web platform, in spite of an abundance of materials and supporting materials on the LEARN website.

In addition, it appeared the diversity of the sectors taught by the schools selected for the E-Platform project in BiH (agriculture, commerce, metal works) may not have been conducive to networking in this very fragmented country.

D. School managers and teachers as drivers of change

Bearing in mind that the VET teacher profession has a low status and remuneration, the majority of the school directors and teachers who had been involved in LEARN activities

saw themselves as "drivers of change" in the sense that they took pride in participating in new projects. All agreed however on the fact that motivation and VET competences need often to be complemented by improved pedagogical skills.

It was remarkable that the teachers/school managers did not emphasize financial benefits as incentives for participating, although low salaries and the lack of performance bonus are generally seen as obstacles to progress.

Other stakeholders, e.g. education specialists with knowledge about the LEARN project and social partners, highlighted that ETF projects had the potential to change the mind-set of VET teachers and that the inclusive approach often created conducive learning cultures.

E. Research function and Early Warning System

The 'accompanying researcher' was another innovative approach of the project, aiming at the dual role of ensuring a regular monitoring of progress complemented by an informed inside-looking and solutions-oriented assessment capacity, based on the in-depth sector knowledge of the researcher. Instant feedback – hence the "early warning" component - could be provided where examples of good or bad practices could be detected (e.g. poor presentation of seminar documents). The function also included ensuring the institutional memory and the visibility of the activities by producing reports, as well as contributing to a longer-term 'vision' capacity of ETF in the region. An underlying aspect included a lesson learning exercise, in order to prepare for the possible dissemination of the function to the various VET Centres.

The research expert was present at most of the LEARN workshops and conferences, except those concerning the Steering Committee. He could therefore draft reports about each event in a timely manner and ensure the necessary accountability of the networking process. He has also prepared the ex-ante, mid-term and final reports for the project.

The tasks of the researcher focused however on the networking activities and did not extend e.g. to the monitoring of the small school projects - nor was this researcher formally trained in monitoring techniques for that purpose. The implementation problems encountered e.g. by the Mentoring project in Macedonia could therefore not be detected in time.

F. Outcomes and spin-offs

Outcomes from LEARN could be found in four of the five countries visited, at various levels (Serbia was not sufficiently involved in the project). These findings were confirmed by the feedback from the three other countries. Due to the regional context, the design of LEARN and the number of other related activities, concrete spin-offs were not numerous and were mostly related to the most practical activities, i.e. the innovative (or small national) school projects.

Professional development of teachers in VET: some of the LEARN participants stressed that the project has been a "eye-opener" for them in terms of getting a better understanding of how the roles and responsibilities of teachers have changed during the last years.

New learning approaches: the majority of the VET teachers were eager to continue working with projects/activities in which they can be involved as from the planning stage, and become actors of change.

Innovative approaches are not necessarily synonymous with large financial allocations: the small school projects – even if not wholly successful - make useful contributions to professional development of teachers, especially when they are combined with networking activities.

Learning material was developed in some cases, as a distinct outcome and spin-off of the project. In Albania, a booklet relating the PBL experience has been published to a large extent by NAVETA[1], which has also translated the lessons learned from PBL into the national curriculum. The PBL experience has furthermore been used in a wider project involving 10 new VET schools since 2009, with Swiss support. In Turkey, course material which was developed during the project is reportedly being used by the In-service Department of the MoE.

1.4. Key conclusions

Due to the often complex political situation in the concerned countries, the proposed objectives of the LEARN project (see chapter 2.1) have only partly been achieved. Whereas the first specific objective (to clarify challenges to be faced by VET Centres) has arguably been reached through information and exchanges provided during seminars as well as by the comprehensive strategic planning exercise carried out at the end of LEARN, the three other objectives have been affected at various levels by the specificities of the respective national policies.

Policy Learning

The findings clearly indicate that all the concerned VET Centres have to operate in policy environments which are still both centralised and unstable at various degrees, and which have an obvious impact on their freedom of manoeuvre. In a very valuable exercise carried out at the end of the LEARN project, all the VET Centres were requested to prepare their own strategic plans, based on a common template.

Although some of the goals and expected results of these strategic plans still seem quite distant from the current situations, they represent to this date a relevant framework. In spite of difficulties, all stakeholders agree that VET Centres need to achieve a more influential role in VET implementation and professional development of teachers.

In that context, the much appreciated ETF LEARN approach based on providing inspiration, networking and exchange of experiences – rather than top-down policies - can currently only hope to benefit from some 'windows of opportunities', pending further political reforms and increased decentralisation and independence from the ministries. In the more conducive policy environment initiated by the government of Albania for the past two years, the positive development of NAVETA clearly demonstrates the usefulness of the ETF approach.

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[1] The National VET Agency

At school/teacher level, Policy Learning in terms of promoting and adapting new approaches depends heavily from external/central support; this was most noticeably measured by the achievements of the small country projects. The lack of support and involvement from the authorities and/or the VET Centres led to frustration and de-motivation (Montenegro, Macedonia) and hence to a poor outcome. Even though ETF could not possibly be held accountable for such external factors, useful lessons learnt need to be captured regarding the organisation of future school based projects.

Innovative learning approaches and new roles of VET teachers
All the stakeholders who took part in the LEARN workshops/seminars highlighted the open and fruitful atmosphere of these networking events. International VET experts were e.g. praised for not trying to impose their own national systems on the participants.

Growing connections between SEE and EU countries will gradually put additional focus on the educational systems' capacities to respond to labour market demands for skilled labour, which will in turn require increased proficiency and initiatives from VET schools and teachers. The school developing projects undertaken under LEARN have contributed to this objective. Where the projects were (partly) successful - or even sometimes where they seem to have failed -, they appear nevertheless to have provided a significant contribution to the capacity building of the concerned schools and the collective competence development, by changing mindsets towards the need of reforms and opening to new approaches.

ETF approach and CoP
As already stated, the added value of the "soft" ETF approach which was promoting ownership and commitment of local actors, was compared by several stakeholders to the top-down programming so often adopted by much larger donor interventions.

The ensuing ETF SEE TT and LEARN networking has been most effective as it covered all countries of the region with similar set ups in each country. There are still more similarities than differences among educational systems, and the ETF networking was useful to discuss and exchange views on themes and problems of common interest. The networking furthermore contributed to mixing stakeholders at all levels (MoE, universities, school directors and teachers), and putting them in contact with each other and with EU actors. The study trips to countries with advanced VET systems not only served as an "eye-opener" but also as inspirational inputs to qualify the policy discussions both in their own country and in the region.

As a project vehicle, CoP turned out to be suitable to the planned activities in a national and regional environment and with countries in a transition phase. CoP is not a complicated tool, nor is it expensive compared to other VET interventions. SEE countries are in a direct need to develop their educational systems, and priorities have to be made with limited financial resources. For that purpose CoP was/is an appropriate tool to deploy.

The networking however happened essentially in the course of the direct contacts established during workshops etc, rather than through the intended web-based media.

None of the LEARN participants interviewed have made use of the ETF web-site, reportedly for reasons of language or access. As a result, networking between the main events, as well as activities among the country teams and the project teams, was somewhat limited. On the other hand it was a common finding that the participants received and read ETF project materials.

At school level, recurrent constraints to web-based communication derived from the lack of IT skills, English proficiency, or sufficient access to the internet. In the much fragmented political context of BiH, the diversity of the courses taught by the selected VET schools did not appear to have been conducive either to creating and maintaining a web-based CoP between VET schools located in three different entities. In these respects, lessons may have to be retained for the design of possible future school projects.

1.5. Key recommendations

Policy Learning

Despite their current mixed performances and capacities, it is strongly recommended to continue supporting the VET Centres. The past experiences from EU countries has recognized and documented that the development of robust and effective VET management systems takes time and demands support from stakeholders outside the traditional education system. Such experiences also indicate that when these structures start to be effective, the quality of VET deliveries increases accordingly.

At the school level, it is recommended to focus possible future small projects on self-governance and decentralisation of the VET schools. These projects, which would be consistent with the LEARN school approach, should be envisaged as a joint venture between a number of networking VET schools and the corresponding VET Centres. The focal point of such decentralisation projects could be how the schools, in close cooperation with the VET Centre, could identify areas for self development and improve the links between the schools and the VET Centre. Schools selected to take part in small projects should be more adequately supported, where necessary, in terms of IT skills and English proficiency, e.g. through training

To mitigate the effects of frequent ministerial turnover, a Memorandum of Understanding (MoU) should be signed in each country between ETF and the respective Ministries of Education (MoE), to provide a clear description of the objectives, modus operandi and roles of both parties. The MoU should also designate a focal point/function within the Ministry for purposes of continuity of the coordination.

It is also recommended to continue supporting the VET Centres by involving them in further networking with examples of good practice in the EU, and also updating and pursuing their 2009 strategic planning (aiming in particular at gaining more self-governance and setting up adequate legal basis), and as practical coordinators of school projects.

ETF should furthermore support the VET Centres in improving the – still weak - links to labour market representatives and specifically targeting how contributions from employers' organisations, Chambers of Commerce and (teacher) unions can contribute to professional development of the VET teachers.

Others area for future support to VET Centres could be the NQF (national Qualification Framework systems, which are already set up), as a platform for VET quality assurance activities. In addition, the VET centres could be supported in projects that focus on creating awareness of reinforcing apprentice systems.

Innovative learning approaches and new roles of VET teachers

VET schools are still in need of continuous networking support, as they are often struggling against - or in parallel to - MoE, to help them monitor and achieve appropriate levels of quality and competence with other regional countries and the EU. It is therefore recommended to continue funding small school developing projects which have significantly contributed to open minds to new learning approaches and teachers' roles and which have been eagerly called for by all stakeholders, even where the projects have not materialised into actual activities.

The E-portfolio project in particular, which was not successful under LEARN, could e.g. present a significant potential within the current improved institutional settings in Montenegro. It could be linked to a future teachers' licensing system and could further support communication, learning and networking activities.

In their inception, school projects should however be subject to careful preparation and planning procedures, e.g. fact finding and appraisal phases.

It is recommended to enhance school networking by supporting a broadening of the dialogue (through internet, workshops etc) between the concerned schools and (i) other schools operating in similar VET sectors (business, agriculture etc) in the region, and in the EU (for possible twinning).

Future school projects and networking should possibly be reinforced by the nomination and training of individuals who could serve as 'ambassadors for drivers of change', i.e. focal points for networking activities.

ETF approach and CoP

It is recommended to continue the "soft" approach of networking (through workshops and conferences, and perhaps also by using widely used social networks such as e.g. Facebook), in particular where the preconditions of stable political environment and legal basis for VET Centres are not yet fulfilled.

It is also recommended to continue using CoP as a project vehicle in learning and competence development projects, as it has e.g. been done in Montenegro and BiH. A crucial issue concerns however the principles for designing CoPs. It is recommended that all projects start with a robust planning phase in which all potential participants are involved from the very beginning, and that a kind of 'collective charter'/MoU be defined to include issues such as e.g. rationale and scope of the network, key roles, expectations, or performance indicators (for monitoring).

To ensure the sustainability and optimum use of networking it should furthermore be considered to appoint local/regional CoP facilitators to organise network meetings, maintain (or "stimulate") from time to time the network between bigger events (seminars, conferences) through low-level inputs (information, topics for discussion), disseminate materials and monitor the effectiveness of the network.

The approach of the accompanying researcher should be reinforced by providing training in monitoring and evaluation to the concerned expert(s), extending the scope of their activities to school projects, and defining a status which would guarantee the independence of their function within VET Centres.

2. Introduction

2.1. Objectives of the LEARN project

The LEARN project has been implemented from 2007 to 2009 and has taken place in a number of South Eastern European (SEE) countries which had already benefited from the VET TT Network, established by ETF in 2002: Albania, Bosnia i Herzegovina (BiH), Croatia, Kosovo, the Former Yugoslav Republic of Macedonia ('Macedonia'), Montenegro, Serbia and Turkey.

The rationale for the network and consecutively the LEARN project was the perception that development of technical/vocational teacher training has not been given the same attention as other interventions in the VET reform processes, e.g. reforms of curricula and formulation and restructuring of VET professions.

Linked to the increased focus on professional development of VET teachers was the challenge to develop and support networking and learning practices that could nurture and support "policy learning" among the LEARN participants.

This approach was based on the concept of "community of practice" (CoP), which was promoted among the members of equivalent institutions in the participating countries. A basic assumption for using this approach was the assembly of persons sharing the same views and to a great extent facing the same challenges in developing their VET teacher training systems. Hence the CoP should be seen as an overarching concept with purpose of linking stakeholders from the participating countries on a common learning platform.

In this framework, the LEARN project has proposed a number of interlocking objectives, as follows (see also Annex A.1). The long term objective of the project was: "to contribute to the national capacity for VET policy formulation and implementation by strengthening the professional expertise of the recently established VET Centres or functional equivalents in South East Europe"[2].

Immediate objectives were as follows:
   a) to clarify the challenges faced by the new VET Centres and to familiarise participants with practice examples from abroad relating to the innovation of teaching and learning;
   b) to establish local capacity to cope with and carry out innovative school-based development projects, to translate the concepts of innovation and entrepreneurship learning into meaningful teaching and learning arrangements, and to master international cooperation in VET, including forming partnerships with foreign institutions;

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[2] As above: Albania, BiH, Macedonia, Kosovo, Montenegro, Serbia, Croatia and Turkey.

c) to take a leading role in the planning and implementation of the annual conferences of the ETF VET TT Network, which rotated between the countries from 2007 – 2009;

d) to make operational and efficient example of how practitioners share and develop competence and knowledge together in practised communities and contribute to the international debate on communities of practice.

LEARN was designed as a policy and peer learning project with a key emphasis placed on designing and implementing activities targeting policy learning in partnerships. These activities were closely linked to the long term objective concerning professionalization of the VET Centres. It was however acknowledged that VET Centres in the SEE countries have a short history and would be facing significant challenges in the political endeavours to strengthen and reforming the VET system.

2.2. The context of the LEARN project

The very comprehensive document "Learning from LEARN"[3] has highlighted that the project was building upon a number of principles and lessons learnt from the SEE VET network, initiated in 2002 and still actively supported. In general terms, the ETF VET TT network has served two purposes:

- to promote and nurture cooperation among countries with a recent (and sometimes ancient) tradition for mutual hostility;
- through networking and dialogue activities, to exchange and disseminate information of good practices within the implementation of VET reforms and with a specific focus on the role of VET teachers in the participating countries.

The LEARN project was also implemented in a period characterized by VET reforms. Until the early 1990s, the SEE countries were operating rather similar educational systems, aimed at responding to changes in the labour market of socialist-type economies. Due to the intensive industrialisation of these countries, the main demands typically concerned skilled labour. The VET systems in the SEE countries were in general terms seen as stable and relatively well advanced in comparison with other European countries.

As pointed out in the "Learning from LEARN" publication, the decade of conflicts that followed resulted in an immense setback of the educational systems in the SEE and especially with regards to VET, where disintegration often took place. The crisis resulted in the lack of VET qualifications in society, followed by decrease in competiveness of the industry.

With the post-war rehabilitation of the region, this situation has been replaced by a period of reforms. Even if the conditions and features in the VET sector may vary among the countries involved in the LEARN project, some key VET development trends can be identified.

- Promotion and implementation of tools and schemes for the decentralisation of VET, as SEE countries have to make up with a long history of centralised systems.

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[3] ETF, 2011

- Heightening the quality and attractiveness of VET, e.g. quality education as a foundation for future training.
- Improving the links between VET and the labour market, e.g. promoting a close matching of skill supply to the needs of enterprises and labour markets.
- The VET programmes, either school oriented or based on a dual system, are still in the infancy, which naturally sets up some limits regarding how far and how swiftly the process can evolve.
- Empowerment of VET schools in terms of granting more autonomy and self-governance. History has often led to a cautious approach in the decentralisation and reform activities, which obviously has an implication on the speed of the process.
- More focus on professionalization of VET teachers and teaching approaches.

These priorities are inspired in particular by the EU VET policy trends, e.g. the Copenhagen Declaration and the Lisbon Strategy, and reflect the SEE countries' aspirations to become members of the EU.

It should be noted that in the LEARN process, much attention was paid to the VET Centres[4] and especially to their capacity to take a stronger position in the implementation of VET reforms, either already initiated or planned to take place. The Centres were designed as the national "anchors" of the LEARN project. Stakeholders and VET specialists however acknowledge the following:

- ❖ The VET Centres are still fragile and virginal. From countries with a long history and tradition for VET, it is known and recognised that development takes its time among other things because more stakeholders are involved in the VET process, compared with general high school education.
- ❖ The VET Centres are often understaffed and are not provided with the financial and other resources that would be necessary to deliver results commensurate with the objectives and intensions of the VET reforms.
- ❖ The VET Centres are, in organisational terms, generally placed in between the Ministry of Education (they also sometimes report to other Ministries as well) and the VET schools, with a limited level of self-governance and legal authority.
- ❖ There often exists a lack of coordination between design and implementation of VET policies, as also expressed in the Learning from LEARN report.

3. Methodology

3.1. General approach

The evaluation has been implemented between the end of July and the beginning of October 2011 by a team of three consultants: Jorgen Ole Larsen, Team Leader and VET Expert; Michel Van Bruaene, Evaluation Expert; and Lujza Bojchova, Administration Expert.

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[4] As explained in the 'Learning from LEARN' publication, the expression 'VET Centre' includes different organisational set-ups and structures.

After a preliminary desk review, a briefing took place at ETF in Turin on 1st and 2nd August, which led to a partial re-formulation of the evaluation questions and to the fine-tuning of the methodological tools (below). A draft inception report was delivered on 7th August.

The finalisation of the corresponding planning of field visits and travel arrangements continued throughout the holiday period until the approval of the travel budget, on 30th August only. Introduction letters from ETF to the field stakeholders were received on 31st august, a few days only before the planned beginning of the visits. These delays could nonetheless be overcome by the Administrative Expert, who managed to set up all the necessary meetings.

The field visits were carried out from 4th until 21st September and covered successively the five countries designated in the Terms of Reference (ToR section 3.2, see Annex E): Albania, Montenegro, FYR Macedonia (Macedonia), Serbia and Bosnia and Herzegovina (BiH). This chronological order, dictated by the particular importance of some actors (e.g. the researcher in Albania), their availability and logistical constraints, has been kept in the report for practical purposes. Despite the limited timeframe, it was decided to travel in team rather than separately, and carry out combined interviews wherever possible in order to optimize the quantity and quality of the information collected.

The methods for collection and analysis of findings were consistent with those proposed in the tentative work plan of the inception report (section 3.5), i.e. individual meetings with directors and school principals, often combined with workshops that involved other concerned staff and teachers, as well as focus discussions with external stakeholders.

In every country, the evaluation has been able to meet most of the key actors and stakeholders who had been mentioned in the project documents (reports, publications) and among the lists of attendants to relevant seminars that had been organised after the end of LEARN in the framework of e.g. the SEEVET-Net or ERI SEE networks.

These actors included, in each visited country: the national VET Centre (or Pedagogical Institute in BiH), representatives from the Ministry of Education (MoE) except in Serbia, the principals and key teachers of the schools involved in the "small national projects" implemented under LEARN (except the "Turizm" school in Tirana where the person in charge was absent), and in the innovative schools mentioned in a dedicated ETF brochure[5] (except the combined VET school of Plav in Montenegro). In addition, external observers were met where possible, such as representatives of Chambers of Commerce (Macedonia, Serbia), Trade Unions (Montenegro, BiH), and university experts (Montenegro, Macedonia). In total, 63 stakeholders could be interviewed in the field, including some 40 former participants to the project, as shown in table 1. Three more actors were contacted by mail and Skype (see also below and in Annex C).

It should be noted that, since the evaluation questions (see chapter 3.2) did not focus on the work of the Steering Committee which gathered government representatives from each concerned country, these actors have not been targeted by the methodological approach (only one has been met in BiH, although for another purpose).

Table 1

	Albania	Montenegro	Macedonia	Serbia	BiH	Total
MoE	1	1	1		1	4
VET Centre	4	2	1	1	1	9
Schools	10	7	14	5	7	43
External observers		2	2	2	1	7
Total	15	12	18	8	10	63

The contacted persons have been provided whenever relevant and feasible (indicated phone and mail addresses had sometimes changed) with a prior list of general questions – derived from the evaluation questions (below) and relevant to their position (Ministry, VET Centre, school), to be used as preparation and guideline for the meetings.

Since the objective of the evaluation concerned the overall assessment of the LEARN project over the period 2007 – 2009 (ToR, 3.1), the three partner countries or entities which were not included in the field visits (Croatia, Kosovo and Turkey) have been approached separately. In these countries, key actors have been questioned during a non-related field visit (Kosovo), by teleconference (Croatia) or by mailing selected evaluation questions (Turkey).

It should be noted that a potential constraint, common to ex-post evaluations, i.e. the turnover of "institutional memories" after the end of the project, did not materialise in this case. Most of the actors involved in the project between 2007 and 2009 were still in place, or working in a different position in the same organisation (or a contiguous one). A few had retired (e.g. MoE in Serbia and BiH) or been replaced, although memories - and often outcomes - of the project were still vivid in e.g. all of the visited schools, which allowed a valuable "triangulation" of findings in each country, leading to some patterns.

3.2. Evaluation questions

Evaluation questions are arguably the most central element of the ToR of every evaluation mission, as they are meant to represent the key concerns of the donor regarding the project or programme to be assessed. The main task of the evaluation is to respond to these concerns as adequately as possible.

Evaluation questions need therefore be carefully formulated, and every outstanding issue regarding their content and meaning needs to be duly clarified during the inception phase. In this respect, the briefing was quite productive as the various meetings could lead to a number of amendments. The initial list of nine questions (see ToR in Annex E) was modified into a reduced set of seven questions, as follows.

a. Did the LEARN project contribute to nurture a new approach to the **reform of VET teacher competence development** which is better embedded in national structures and the new learning paradigm?

b. Did the project contribute to introduce changes in terms of **collective competence development at school level**, within the concerned schools and beyond? Would there be more cost-effective ways to achieve such competences? Did the acquired competences foster discussions and policy interface with the national VET policies?

c. What are the institutional links, which have been created between the national VET policies and the project? Are the **VET centres** playing their intended role as

'anchors' for institutional links? Did the VET centres help to create a real capacity to consolidate, accumulate and take forward new knowledge?

d. How are the web based **COPs** created by the project operating? Are they used as intended for horizontal learning? What are the other VET networks which are operating at regional and/or country level? How effective are they?

e. Do the **school managers and teachers**, who have been involved in the project, see themselves as professionals and stakeholders with a stronger 'voice' (possibly "drivers") for change, who contribute to develop and mature ideas? Do other stakeholders see these school actors as bottom-up drivers of change?

f. How effective were the accompanying **research function and the early warning system** (EWS) which were utilised in the project?

g. What were the **outcomes and spin-offs** of the project, among the outcomes of the long and joint learning process supported by ETF, to foster increased awareness on how to organize VET learning process in South East Europe?

These revised questions have been used as the basis for the evaluation matrix (see below and in Annex B) and, for consistency purposes, for the corresponding order of the seven chapters of this report which are devoted to findings (4.1 to 4.7).

3.3. Evaluation matrix

As requested in section 3.2 of the ToR, the methodological approach has integrated the five OECD/DAC6 evaluation criteria (relevance, efficiency, effectiveness, impact and sustainability), together with the added value of the LEARN project, which was also specified in the ToR. Evaluation questions are typically complemented where necessary by corresponding judgement criteria and qualitative or quantitative indicators, to further sub-divide and focus the assessment on objective issues.

The Matrix (Annex B) has therefore been used as a compendium which has complemented the revised evaluation questions with the DAC criteria, formulated as judgment criteria. A number of indicators have been added, which have been found relevant to VET in South Eastern Europe. According to DAC best practice, all the criteria do not need to be considered systematically for each evaluation question – only those which are most relevant should be treated.

The Matrix has been considered as the key tool of the evaluation throughout the field visits. It has been used by the team members in a consistent manner whenever they performed interviews with stakeholders, individually or in group. Distinct parts of the matrix have also been used according to the position of the stakeholder who was interviewed.

It should be stressed that an evaluation process relies on appropriate tools (e.g. the Matrix), but even more so on the personal capacity of the evaluators to assess findings based on their analytical skills, and to compare them with similar situations which they had witnessed previously. Judgments, which should be as objective as possible but which are also sometimes partly and inevitably subjective, are essentially based on the professional experience of the evaluators. A matrix is therefore primarily an internal guideline and a reminder which allows evaluation team members to coordinate their approaches – in

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[6] Organisation for Economic Co-operation and Development/ Development Assistance Committee

particular when they operate separately - and avoid overlooking key issues. It is however by no means obligatory or limitative: evaluators must be able to perceive which information a specific stakeholder may be prepared or willing to deliver, and to seize opportunities or unexpected sources and types of information as they may appear; an evaluation should therefore not be confused with e.g. an approach in social sciences. In this perspective - as it is the case here, the matrix is usually presented without internal notations in an annex to the report, for reference purposes.

4. Main Findings

4.1. Contributions to the reform process of VET teachers training

Evaluation question A:

> *Did the LEARN project contribute to nurture a new approach to the **reform of VET teacher competence development** which is better embedded in national structures and the new learning paradigm?*

General findings

The stakeholders interviewed during the evaluation mission shared the general perception that training and professional development of teachers and trainers is an area that requires increased political and strategic actions. Everyone expressed the huge need for systems that can equip VET teachers and trainers with specialist knowledge of their subject, as well as updated pedagogical/didactical skills.[7]

Pre-service training for teachers and trainers employed in VET schools is not provided in any of the five countries. It should be highlighted that pre-service training for VET teachers remains the exception rather the rule in all SEE countries. In addition VET teachers do not receive any kind of pedagogical or didactical lessons in universities, where the majority of VET teachers are recruited.

Some pedagogical courses have been provided as part of the implementation of the EU Phare, CARDS and IPA programmes[8]. In addition, several of the SEE countries have started to prepare the introduction of a teacher licensing system, which among other components includes mandatory pre-service training, e.g. 100 hours within the first two years of employment.

At the same time it is acknowledged that mandatory pre-service training for VET teachers will be very costly and will demand extensive human resources. In Kosovo, the EU Education SWAp project made a rough estimate of costs incurred by a mandatory arrangement.[9] The total costs for 24.000 (primary and secondary) teachers provided with 100 hours of pre-service training amounted to more than 4 million Euros.

The LEARN project shall be evaluated in this context, and bearing in mind that ETF is not initiating very large 'top-down' programmes like CARDS and IPA but focusing on projects where innovative learning approaches are discussed and nurtured in pilot projects before implementation.

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[7] This has been documented and highlighted in a number of EU, ETF, CEDEFOP, OECD and ILO papers.
[8] Aid programme for economic reconstruction of Eastern Europe; Community Assistance for Reconstruction, Development and Stabilisation; Instrument for Pre-Accession
[9] EU Education SWAp project. Report on Capacity Building Needs Assessment of the Municipal Directorates. June 2010 – Prishtina/Pristina

4.1.1 Albania

The reform process of VET has recently accelerated in Albania. For the past two years, due to the need to adapt the National Qualification Framework (NQF) to the European one (EQF), and under the supervision of the Prime Minister, the VET system has significantly been pushed forward on the political agenda. The issue of preparing national qualification standards in accordance with the European standards is further detailed in section 4.3

The feedback and perception from stakeholders met in Albania about LEARN contributions were positive, and were e.g. expressed in the following statements:

- The school projects caused improved awareness of the need to start working with professional development on the individual school basis (decentralisation).
- The ETF LEARN project fitted very well into other donor intervention aiming at VET teacher development, e.g. KulturKontakt Austria.
- Much inspiration and inputs were achieved from taking part in international networking and workshops.

One of the interviewees has also used the following (incisive) comparison:

> "*As to bringing about an impact on reforming VET teacher competence development, the LEARN project is one drop among many others in Albania*".

The above picture encapsulated quite appropriately how the project was perceived by the majority of persons met during the mission. Indeed, the impact from LEARN should be seen in a perspective and a context where a limited amount of money and resources, allocated in a number of different countries and amongst many other donor contributions, has produced an impression in the minds of the LEARN participants

Finally, reference should be made to a specific textbook/manual prepared by the VET agency with the support from the LEARN project. The manual is a practical guide to project based learning (PBL), prepared after the completion of the PBL small country project. The school project is further detailed in section 4.5

Teachers and school managers specifically referred to this publication as a means to provide practical and methodical support to problem based learning, and in a broader sense contribute to awareness creation among VET teachers.

4.1.2 Montenegro

The Montenegrin Vocational Education Development Strategy (2010-14) [10] was prepared by a working group consisting of the Ministry of Education and Science (MoE), the VET Centre, the Ministry of Labour and Social Welfare, the Employment Office of Montenegro, the Chamber of Commerce and the Confederation of Trade Unions. The working group was assisted by the German cooperation organisation GIZ[11].

A GIZ-supported project named "Creating jobs through vocational training" has also implemented training courses for a hundred teachers to this date, introducing the action-oriented approach.

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[10] Montenegrin Vocational Education Development Strategy (2010-14), Montenegro Ministry of Education and Science - 2010
[11] Deutsche Gesellshaft für Internationale Zusammenarbeit.

Stakeholders representing VET schools and governmental VET representatives highlighted that ETF impact on VET teacher training is noticeable at the policy level, by providing platforms for exchange of good practices.

It was specifically emphasized that the E-portfolio small country project, in spite of difficulties in the planning and implementation of the project, has made a major contribution as to how a future teacher license system could be organised (see section 4.2).

4.1.3 FYR Macedonia (Macedonia)
Macedonia has during the last 15 years been supported by a number of EU funded projects, e.g. IPA and Phare. According to one of the persons interviewed these interventions did not have any visible impact on national policies for - or approaches to professional development of teachers.

This may be explained by the detrimental lack of continuity in the current political system and more specifically at the Ministry level. Frequent political changes entail the turnover of the minister but also of the main advisers (and often of VET Centre directors, who are political appointees), which regularly obliges to restart the process and thereby also a policy learning process. This issue will be further elaborated in section 4.3.

In this rather poor framework, two interviewees[12] pointed at the added value of ETF/LEARN activities as it followed a flexible approach:
- setting up partnerships, letting actors discuss, instead of imposing more rigid, pre-defined programmes, which is often the case with other EU organisations;
- networking, initiating and contributing to maintain connections at all levels among countries of the region, within homogeneous groups (MoE, VET centres, schools) and between these groups.

4.1.4 Serbia
In Serbia, impact from the LEARN project could not be identified, due to a number of detrimental factors, e.g:
- frequent changes in the government, leading to instability of the education and training institutions, primarily the VET Centre;
- linked to the above, the fact that Serbia did not participate in the school based development project.

4.1.5 Bosnia and Herzegovina (BiH)
The extremely fragmented institutional framework of the country – the most complex in the region with no less than 13 or 14 distinct actors[13] - makes any reforms extremely time-consuming and challenging. To this should be added some persistent lack of willingness to cooperate on many inter-entity cases. Furthermore, there is no VET Centre(s) in BiH, but pedagogical institutes (1 in each canton) which are working with corresponding Ministries on the relevant issues, although not specifically for VET (efforts are also combined with nursery, primary, gymnasium and higher education systems). The contribution of LEARN in this framework has been minimal, beyond the much favoured networking.

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[12] The former adviser for primary and secondary education and a professor at the Institute of Pedagogy
[13] 1 MoE for the Brcko district, the Federal Ministry of Civil Affairs in Sarajevo, the Federal MoE also in Sarajevo and 1 MoE for each of the 10 cantons, plus a separate body supervising Republika Srpska.

4.2. Collective competence development at school level

Evaluation question B:

> *Did the project contribute to introduce changes in terms of collective competence development at school level, within the concerned schools and beyond? Would there be more cost effective ways to achieve such competences? Did the acquired competences foster discussions and policy interface with the national policies?*

General findings

Most interviewees highlighted that collective development at school level is an urgent need, and that ETF and the LEARN project at the school level have had an impact on how the schools see themselves in this process, especially in terms of taking initiatives without awaiting the approval or directives from the central level.

This positive attitude towards school projects did also include school directors and teachers, even though the outcomes from the projects often did not achieve the anticipated objectives, due to various reasons.

It should be noted that the LEARN-funded school projects were often related to other donor-financed activities, e.g. by the Austrian KulturKontakt in Albania, and this kind of coordination created synergy and most probably generated additional impact.

The LEARN project was based on a peer-learning approach and included testing and exploring of how CoP (Communities of Practices) can be applied to a number of contexts/domains, e.g. the school developing projects. When working according to the objectives and not hampered by outside influences, the school developing projects demonstrated the strengths of CoP, e.g. implementing learning activities with a small amount of invested money and at the same time creating a spirit of community. This issue will be elaborated in the recommendation section.

Requests for more funds are normally a standard feedback from stakeholders in donor financed projects. This was however definitely not so among the LEARN school project participants. It was commonly agreed that much had been achieved with the small amount of money provided, and that possible lacks of achievement should not necessarily be explained by limited financial resources.

It was significant that a successful implementation and further continuation of school projects are heavily dependent on enthusiastic and devoted actors. This of course also has an impact on the extent to which the approach is disseminated beyond the original participants.

Dissemination and continuation of projects did in some cases take place. Whether dissemination beyond the participating schools materialised into networking activities was more difficult to assess, though. *This will be detailed in section 4.5.*

4.2.1 Albania - ("project-based learning" project – PBL)

Agro-business school in Korce

The agro-business school, "Irakli Terova" of Korce is one of the ten innovative schools portrayed in the ETF publication "Portraits of innovative vocational schools". The school was selected by the Albanian National VET agency (NAVETA). According to the school management and concerned staff, the LEARN-supported PBL project has positively contributed to changing mentalities in the school, among the teachers and in their relations to students. This was achieved by introducing more practice ('learning by doing') and carrying out a variety of work activities in neighbouring or school-owned farms.

The former director (the main initiator of the PBL project in the school) has however been replaced and his successor has only limited knowledge of the project and the principles behind it. Hence the project approach has not been fully incorporated in the current school's overall planning, and is rather dependent on the initiatives of devoted and enthusiastic teachers.

The former director highlighted the good cooperation with NAVETA in terms of providing support and inputs, and especially the manual for project based learning which was highly appreciated. Finally he advocated strongly for initiating more small school projects: "they are cheap, can be changed easily and have noticeable impact".

Food processing school in Durres

The PBL approach is well remembered by the school management despite the time elapsed; it was the 1st project from which the school had benefited, and it has had a positive impact, which can still be perceived today: teachers are now used to work in a more practical way with projects, mixing theory with practice, and involving more actively the students who are working in groups with team leaders, designated tasks etc.

The school furthermore appreciates the integration of the PBL/project approach in the curriculum of VET schools by NAVETA. This practical approach allows the school to work more closely with the business community of Durres (which includes numerous hotels, restaurants etc), and to place students more easily since "companies prefer to hire qualified students than to take youths from the street".

Agriculture school in Kamza

The project was well prepared by NAVETA, with e.g. a large seminar gathering all 35 concerned teachers out of the 4 selected schools, who could share experience and set up a network for further feedback. The project itself (planting olive trees in an area near Tirana which has increasingly become industrialised) was 'moderately' successful, but it provided the opportunity to introduce and train all school teachers in the "mini-business" approach (or "virtual companies" as the concept is also called) which had been in its inception phase in the school for some years already, thanks to a very dynamic coordinator.

There is a good ongoing cooperation with NAVETA, which has included the example of the school in its new booklet, to be further disseminated in a "wind of change". According to the school management and staff, LEARN has made a difference despite limited resources, and has contributed to changing mentalities, in a problem-solving perspective. The

teachers and school coordinator could really see themselves as 'actors of change', and would like to further disseminate this type of innovative solution through exchanges with other schools in the region, e.g. in Kosovo.

VET centres and professional development of VET teachers
As stated in the introduction and in the 'Learning from LEARN' publication, the SEE VET Centres (or equivalent institutions) are still fragile and in an infancy stage. In spite of differences in the organisational structures, it seems to be a common set up that professional development of VET teachers in the sense of implementing pre- and in-service training are not included in the VET centres' sphere of authority. These functions are normally covered by the respective national pedagogical institutes. Still, the above mentioned NAVETA support to the schools clearly documents that VET Centres, indirectly, can play an important role in nurturing and promoting competence development in the VET schools. *This issue will be further elaborated in the recommendations section.*

4.2.2 Montenegro ("E-portfolio" project)

VET school "Spasoje Raspopovic", Podgorica
12 teachers were involved in the E-portfolio project out of 54, i.e. the volunteers, and those who had sufficient English and computer skills (there is only 1 ICT classroom in the school, and "many teachers are still not used to internet and need training"). Others were reluctant as they did not see concrete value in the project, since the official system does not provide any incentive payment systems for professional development.

There was a good level of cooperation with the VET Centre and ETF experts, relevant preparation to the project, and valuable sharing of information and experience regarding e.g. the feelings of the teachers. An outcome of the project was the mixing of those teachers who are responsible for their own class throughout the year, and others who handle temporary courses only.

The school achievements have reportedly been highly rated by an external evaluation carried out by the MoE, although it was not possible to this evaluation team to ascertain the extent of the electronic use of the portfolios (the school produced only written files, which is consistent with the findings from the other schools below).

The school expressed their outspoken motivation to embark on other (innovative) projects and this was not only reflected in the school management but also among the teachers, a clear indication of a collective competence development process.

VET Economic and Catering high school, Niksic
The LEARN E-portfolio project was stopped on its tracks before even starting in practice, just after the presentation by ETF, the preparation of the action plan by the school, and the accepted commitment of the teachers (contrary to the Podgorica school above, in Niksic there were enough teachers with adequate knowledge of English and computers, despite the lack of ICT equipment in the school).

In spite of the VET Centre's outspoken support to and appraisal of the E-portfolio project, the Centre was apparently not (yet) in a position to disentangle a complex institutional situation regarding the electronic management of the database (see also 4.3.2).

There seems indeed to have been a legal problem of running in parallel two databases which both concerned the professional development of the teachers, one linked to the LEARN E-portfolio project, and the other which was to be managed at central level by the Pedagogical Institute and which concerned all education sectors. This latter database is reportedly one (important) component of a future teacher license system expected to provide a consistent file of information on teachers' academic qualifications and professional development.

All efforts were not wasted, though. Outcomes include raised awareness for the need of reforms, together with continuous lifelong training, competence development, and the ending of traditional ways of teaching. According to the Niksic School, the E-portfolio approach did also combine quite well as a kind of preparation for other EFT school learning projects following the LEARN project.

Mixed school "Mladost", Tivat
The new director (since 2009) and pedagogue (2010) were not involved in the LEARN E-portfolio project, and could not therefore deliver much comments; they know that the project "did not last", for unclear reasons.

A possible outcome however may be the widespread use of written portfolios by all teachers in the school, which they appreciate very much. Whether these portfolios (introduced more or less 4 years ago) preceded or followed the LEARN project could not be ascertained, but there seems to have been at least a contribution from LEARN.

VET school learning projects following the LEARN project – promoting key competences
Both the VET Centre and other stakeholders highlighted the ongoing competence development activities that have followed the finalisation of the LEARN project. In 2010, in-service training of a number of pilot secondary schools was conducted, hence bringing forward and elaborating on the CoP, introduced in the framework of the LEARN project (s*ee also 4.3.2).*

4.2.3 FYR Macedonia ("Mentoring project")
The country findings at school level reflect the lack of commitment and coordination capacities of the national VET Centre. This situation was reported by other actors (see section 4.3) and presented a sharp contrast with the involvement of NAVETA in Albania as referred to above.

A new VET director was appointed in 2010. He did not have any knowledge about the LEARN mentoring project: "one of the advisers may have been involved, but there are no documents, nor reports, no feedback".

The lack of project coordination and active involvement from the VET centre was confirmed by other stakeholders, especially the participating schools, as outlined below.

Vet school ASUC "Boro Petrusevski" ("Traffic school"), Skopje
This school is the main promoter of the mentoring approach in the country (it is the *de facto* national mentoring centre), essentially due to the dynamic director and a group of 4 senior teachers. The members of this small team see themselves as "drivers of change" and are

highly committed to investing continuous efforts at school - and homework - for the good of the school, without support from the MoE. The ministry is however "fully informed" and "respects the work being done"; mentoring was more supported by the former minister, but it is now in "limbo" in the new national strategy (this must be complemented by the more accurate information collected in Gostivar – see below). All 94 teachers of the school are also expected to be involved in mentoring activities. Mentoring had been applied in the school before LEARN (the director has been working on this approach for 20 years, and has published a mentoring manual in 2008).

Contrary to most other VET schools in Macedonia, the Traffic school has its own financial resources (from driving examinations etc) and can provide some payment incentives to the teachers without asking to the MoE (there is also in theory a State system that provides incentives for acquired training, but it is not currently operational).

VET school OSTU "Zlate Malakoski", Gostivar

Contrary to most information collected from other sources, the implementation of the LEARN Mentoring project never actually started. There were 3 preparatory meetings in September and October 2008 during which the school was visited by the VET Centre Director and the mentoring initiator from the Skopje Traffic School for presentation and explanation of roles and monitoring documents

All activities stopped at this point, despite the eagerness and enthusiasm of the school participants (5 mentors had been selected but never trained) for the opportunity to change the system. Some old teachers had initially rejected the idea, but became convinced when they were told that it was "for the good of the school" and that the project was not linked to their professional career.

There was never any other support nor useful communication during the following year and thereafter. Every phone call by the school was re-forwarded by the Traffic school to the VET Centre, and vice-versa, without feedback. The project responsible in the school strongly suspects that the Director of the VET Centre was "not sufficiently committed" to the project. The school was never informed about the MoE adviser, who took over some of the coordination role.

VET school "Goso Vikentiev", Kocani

This school fully confirmed the above information regarding the failed implementation of the Mentoring project. As in Gostivar, activities never stated, after the same 3 preparatory meetings. After initial enthusiasm, the 3 volunteer mentors never got any support and became somewhat frustrated, fearing that it was "somehow our fault" and that "others will think that we are lazy".

An outcome was however that the teachers are continuing to apply mentoring internally (still without training), at their own initiative. They stated that they have "lots of spare time" to do further training and networking – which is much eagerly requested; 50% of the teacher (86) are ready to take part in new projects for the good of their school (after Phare I and II, Soros, MoE, EU/Tempus, GTZ/GTI, Dutch Cooperation, EU/EAR, USAID etc), even without being paid.

4.2.4 Serbia

The evaluation team visited the "innovative" VET School HPTS "Uros Predic" in Zrenjanin, since there were no schools involved in small national projects. The school is quite dynamic, is hosting 2 of the 56 pilot curricula in coordination with the VET Centre and can therefore perceive itself as a "driver of change". The extent of the work with LEARN was "not deep", but the school is currently cooperating with the ETF Mutual Learning and Inclusive Education projects. They appreciate receiving ETF publications and are quite open to participate in any new project.

4.2.5 Bosnia i Herzegovina
The underlying objective of the E-platform small country project implemented under LEARN was to create a CoP across the internal borders of several entities (Brcko, Republika Srpska, Federation), under the coordination of the pedagogical institute of Zenica, which was highly appreciated by all actors as the "locomotive" of the project. Schools and coordinator were selected according to their perceived skills (they were not volunteers) by the separate authorities of the Brcko district, Republika Srpska, and the federal Ministry of Civil Affairs for the Federation. According to the Zenica coordinator, there was (and still is) a "potential" for such a project, but the time was "not yet ripe". It should therefore be considered as a "starting point", to be continued.

VET economic school, Bijelina

This school was not part of the LEARN small country project, but has been selected as the country example of innovative schools in the corresponding ETF publication[14]. The school has developed a very comprehensive approach for "virtual companies", in cooperation with the British Council and the Derby College. Bijelina has a special status of experimental school, the only such in BiH. It is also supported by Kultur Kontakt Austria, and has disseminated practices to Banja Luka and Mostar. The school has not been involved in ETF projects (LEARN, Mutual Learning, inclusive education), but receive the ETF publications and appreciate very much the activities and the networking. They are quite open to cooperate in any project, and look forward to seminars, exchanges etc.

In a context where the reforming of the VET system is still in its initial phases - with a fragmented approach and variable quality across the country -, the case of the VET economic school in Bijelina should be highlighted as a model of how VET schools can develop into innovative and experimental places if they are provided with some extent of self-governance.

VET Agricultural and Medical School, Brcko

According to the responsible of the E-platform project, some mistakes were made in project identification:
- there was a "wrong mix" of schools which had not enough in common to set up a CoP (agriculture and medicine in Brcko, commerce in Sarajevo, metal work in Banja Luka);
- there was not enough IT equipment in the school (equipment is by far the first remaining priority of the new principal), with intermittent access only at best through the government server; the responsible was obliged to use his own private e-mail,

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[14] Portraits of Innovative Vocational schools in South Eastern Europe, ETF 2010

with the result that he was the only one to be connected and was alone to take part in the project;

- there were no other volunteers in Brcko, as it is very difficult to motivate teachers who have always the same salary after 25 years, and who cannot be punished either. Teachers are also often not sufficiently skilled in IT, internet and English.
- The school therefore did not take much benefit from the small country project, but appreciated very much the networking of ETF (an outcome was the opening of new horizons and the changing of paradigm in education "from teaching to learning" – at least for the project responsible). The school remains open to new projects.

VET Technical School, Banja Luka

The school was instrumental in the project as its web platform. According to the project coordinator in Zenica, the budget was entirely spent in Banja Luka for the web site and its manager, although the school director could not recollect details about the use of this budget, 2 years after the end of the project.

10 teachers were selected, and the implementation went smoothly, the cooperation was good, without problems to mention. Outcomes can be traced in the continuous use of project skills (e-learning, mentoring, mind-opening) by the concerned teachers, who are disseminating these to their colleagues. They still have "contacts" with the other schools in Brcko and Sarajevo, although at a low level only.

VET trade school, Sarajevo

Findings confirm that the intended CoP failed to materialize also in Sarajevo, as the principal "had no time, was too occupied" to use the web site of Banja Luka (the ETF web site e-platform was not used at all, as access was quite difficult), and did not have sufficient contacts with Brcko. There may also arguably have been a lack of interest in creating a CoP with schools in such different sectors, and there was scant common ground for discussion. Essentially they are more interested in communicating with other commercial schools, as the Sarajevo school is much focused on trade and the "virtual companies" approach.

An outcome of LEARN in general can be found in the development of the school capacities based on seminars and workshops to further engage into virtual companies: 90% of the teachers (34) have become more open to the virtual companies approach.

4.3. VET Centres as anchors for Policy Learning
Evaluation question C:

*What are the institutional links, which have been created between the national VET policies and the project? Are the **VET centres** playing their intended role as 'anchors' for institutional links? Did the VET centres help to create a real capacity to consolidate, accumulate and take forward new knowledge?*

Context/introduction

It was a long-term objective of the project to contribute to the national capacity for VET policy formulation and implementation, by strengthening the professional expertise of the recently established VET Centres (or functional equivalents) in South Eastern Europe.

General findings
It was a common assessment that the VET agencies are still suffering from a number of shortages, e.g. lack of financial and human resources and subordination to the Ministry of Education in terms of self-governance and political authority.

As to professional development of VET teachers this important issue is not (for the moment) included in the scope of authority of the VET Centres. Usually this task is executed by the Pedagogical Institutes, set up and governed by the Ministry of Education. This division of authority and responsibilities can often lead to inappropriate demarcation disputes and hence reduce the awareness of specific VET pedagogical/didactical needs.

It was remarkable, as outlined below, that the status and capacity of the VET Centres varied very much among the countries visited. This had a direct impact on how much the VET Centre could be involved in the planned ETF activities and hence on the outcome of these interventions.

4.3.1 Albania
The national VET agency (NAVETA), which is still widely known as the "Pedagogical Institute", has 16 staff members and is subdivided in 4 sectors. The actors who were involved in 2007-9 are still working there and are duly committed to their tasks. Thanks to new law reform the VET system has recently benefited from significant promotion and support.

According to NAVETA, the strong points of the project (and ETF) have been the quality of the country team and international experts, the flexible objectives of LEARN, and the examples provided about practices and differences in EU VET TT.

The added value of ETF can generally be found in its capacity to set up and maintain networks, although continuous support is still needed (failing which, there may be a risk of losing momentum and enthusiasm, and "falling back to old ways", and the limited resources can be a constraint (this statement has been disputed by the schools involved in the small national project).

The networking of VET agencies throughout the region was duly appreciated, in particular the quality of workshops and conferences. There is a perceived need of additional networking between schools.

In the PBL (project-based learning) small national project, the very dedicated staff of NAVETA was in a position to exert useful supervision and coordination between the four participating schools. *This is further detailed in section 4.5.*

NAVETA is actively taking part in the coordination of donor support to the Albanian VET system. This issue is seen by the agency as very important to ensure that interventions fit into the national VET strategy. This is a clear sign of improved capacity of the VET agency

compared to other countries where lack of coordination too often leads to "donor congestion" and most probably less impact from the interventions.

In 2008, the leader of the evaluation team prepared a feasibility analysis for the Danish Foreign Ministry in order to assess the possibilities for supporting a VET programme in Albania. The task involved a capacity analysis of the newly established VET agency. Comparing the current situation with the prior review, it is significant to observe how NAVETA has developed in terms of taking a leading and visible role in the implementation of VET. Based on the feedback from the stakeholders in Albania, including the staff of the VET agency, it is obvious that the ETF LEARN project has contributed positively to this development.

4.3.2 Montenegro

The national VET Centre, set up in 2003, appears to benefit from well equipped offices and a central location, being in the same building as some other MoE departments (e.g. evaluation). Regular training sessions are being delivered to teachers etc in the Centre premises (during our visit, by a German consultant, using web sources).

The Director praised the ETF activities, highlighting the excellent cooperation and the support provided. The Director was further quoted saying that "ETF is not always sharing the views of the VET Centre, but still the cooperation with ETF is conducive for the VET development in Montenegro". Specific attention was paid to the ETF initiatives to promote key competences of teachers.

Since 2010, both the VET centre and the Bureau for Education Services have been involved in the implementing of in-service training activities for a number of pilot schools. The activities were praised for nurturing school-based learning and promoting networking among the participating schools.

Specific attention was paid to the E-portfolio small county project and the impact that policy learning derived from the activities. The person responsible for the E- portfolio project was very enthusiastic about the project and its wider perspectives in terms of changing the culture and approach on how VET teachers in internal and external network, without large expenses allocated, can improve their professional standards.

In addition the project was also praised by the VET director, who pointed out that an outcome of the project has been to contribute to setting up a central database of CVs of all VET teachers at MoE, i.e. the preparatory steps to introducing a teacher licence system.

However, it also became clear that E-portfolios were stopped after the end of project, despite "good and important results" (in 2 of the 3 concerned schools the project never actually started – see chapter 4.2), without clear explanations.

One explanation (to be possibly qualified due to the complex institutional situation) of the contradicting perceptions of the E-portfolio for teachers could be that the project was targeting professional development of VET teachers, which is not part of the authority area of the VET Centre. This field of responsibility is performed by the Bureau for Education Services, as referred to above. The basic services of the Bureau are the implementation of new curricula, and the in-service training of teachers, school directors and professional

associates. Still, it should be stressed that the ETF school project was due to be based in the VET Centre, which was accordingly expected to play a crucial role in its implementation. This was also the understanding of the VET director.

Another possible explanation could be that the beneficiaries of the project (the VET schools and the teachers) received "mixed messages" from the central level which further made them unsure about what they were supposed to do. Different perceptions of "who is responsible" and unclear description of roles in the project might have added to this uncertainty.

However, the VET Centre stressed that it is still working on the concept, and aims ultimately at expanding the E-portfolio – which would help to foster the central database and allow teachers to update/monitor their own portfolio and trainings.

4.3.3. FYR Macedonia

The Macedonian VET Centre was set up in June 2005 and is operating under the umbrella of the Bureau for Development of Education (BDE). The Centre is however located in old premises far from the BDE. According to the Director, the Centre has 16 employees including 10 advisers and 6 administrative staff, although few were visible during the visit of the evaluation.

The legal status of the Centre is subordinated to both the MoE and the Ministry of Labour. Like in some other countries, these two ministries are not in good terms. The current Director (since 2010) pointed out that the Centre was "caught in the crossfire" between the two Ministries, a situation which had a major impact on the Centre's freedom of action. This was also expressed in the fact that the Centre does not have its own budget for operations (nor its own bank account) and that all allocated funds and documents have to go through the BDE before coming to the Centre.

Like other VET Centres, the services include preparation of curricula, labour market research and designing of new VET programmes. But according to both the Director and other stakeholders, the impact from the Centre services is very limited. This is mainly explained by the lack of authority, the uncomfortable middle position between the two Ministries of reference, the subordination to the BDE and the frequent replacement of directors due to political appointments.

According to the statutes, the VET Centre reports to the Board which comprises representatives from the Ministries and the social partners, e.g. the chambers of commerce and the trade unions. The evaluation team met a former Board member, representing a key chamber of commerce. He was very critical of the Centre's performance and lack of visibility in the labour market. Board meetings were infrequent, no money or resources were available for surveys or campaigns, and the authority of the board was/is very limited.

The Director could not provide any information regarding the LEARN school Mentoring project which had been managed by one of his predecessors, who had reportedly not been "sufficiently committed" (see 4.2.3). His replies translated the very poor condition of the Centre: "one of the advisers may have been involved, but there are no documents, no reports, no feedback".

Support from ETF is much appreciated by the VET Centre, though: a conference is due to take place on 24-26 October 2011 to provide technical support. The Director also evoked plans (reportedly approved by the Board) to move "soon" to a new location; hire 45 employees (sic), set up 4 departments, etc. The Centre should also receive support from the IPA Twinning project, planned to be launched October 2011.

4.3.4 Serbia

The Centre for Vocational and Artistic Education - as the VET Centre is called in Serbia - was established in 2003 as an independent institution. In 2004 however, following an amendment of the VET law, the position of the Centre was downgraded to an organisational unit of the Institute for Improvement of Education, which besides the Centre encompassed three other education-related bodies: the Centre for Strategic Development,

the Centre for Development of the Curricula and Textbooks and the Centre for Professional Development in Education.

This complex institutional arrangement has a number of inappropriate consequences for the implementation and coordination of VET activities. The current situation was highlighted and much regretted by the committed and experienced head of the Centre, and is reflected e.g. in the features listed below:
- there is no proper coordination of how curricula are prepared and implemented;
- there is no internal linkage between new VET professions/profiles established and the corresponding curricula to be prepared;
- the link to the labour market and the VET Council is quite fragile.

The VET system's inadequate relationship with the social partners was confirmed by two managers of the Chamber of Commerce, one of them being also member of the VET Council. Their reservations concerned the Council's lack of influence, difficulties in getting Council proposals implemented, the unclear organisation and slow policy-decision processes.

In spite of the bleak political set up of the VET system, the head of the Centre praised the ETF LEARN project in several aspects. Among other features she stressed that the CoP has provided her with a lot of experiences and inputs concerning how VET can be implemented and quality assured in the region.
She also drew attention to the open and conducive atmosphere that always characterized the project arrangements, a feature that contributed to her own commitment to carry on with her work.

The VET Centre cooperates with 56 associate teachers from various VET schools, who are developing "pilot curricula" and can therefore arguably be seen as "drivers of change".

It is not entirely clear why Serbia could not take part in the small national projects, after having been interested to cooperate in the E-portfolio: a working group had been set up and ICT experts gathered, but there was a lack of support from the MoE, and reportedly a fear that some schools would be privileged, etc.

4.3.5. Bosnia and Herzegovina
There are no distinct VET Centres in BiH. In each of the 12 Ministries of Education (MoE) which cover the ten federal cantons, the Republika Srpska (RS) and the Brcko district, there would normally be a person responsible for VET, but the offices are severely understaffed and hence VET has a low priority in the overall educational policy implementation.
In addition, seven of the MoE's have set up Pedagogical Institutes - some of the Croatian cantons are sharing one such institute – which are dealing with VET on a limited scale.
At the national (federal) level, there is also an agency for pre-primary, primary and secondary education. The agency has a VET unit with (in theory) 7 employees, which has clearly formulated tasks regarding primarily coordinating functions. It does however not exert a direct influence on the separate MoEs in the cantons, RS and Brcko district.

4.4. Web based Communities of Practice (CoP)

Evaluation question D:

How are the web based CoPs created by the project operating? Are they used as intended for horizontal learning? What are the other VET networks which are operating at regional and/or country level? How effective are they?

4.4.1 Introduction/context

As detailed e.g. in chapters 2 and 3 of the 'Learning from LEARN' publication, the project was based on a peer-learning approach with a focus on how to organise policy learning platforms and environments within and between platforms. In addition, the project planned to test the principle of participating in CoPs, and to make optimum use of this approach.

The rationale for this methodology has been thoroughly portrayed in the publication. On this background, the evaluation will analyse how the CoP was utilized and developed in the LEARN project, by using three criteria which are linked both to the CoP approach *per se* and to the project aims.

- whether CoP can increase the project participants' capabilities to build and exchange knowledge;
- Whether CoP can enhance the transfer of good practices;
- Whether CoP can contribute to creating a common understanding of VET policy drivers.

A general evaluation of CoP as a proficient approach in terms of optimizing project objectives and outcomes will further be provided in section 5 (conclusions).

4.4.2 CoP as a means to increase the participants' capabilities to build and exchange knowledge?

Where the small country school projects were implemented in full compliance with their ToR and were provided with the required support from external stakeholders - e.g. the VET Centre and Steering Committee members -, the CoP has demonstrated its unique capacity to nurture and strengthen learning processes.

The school projects in Albania showed how the social learning theory can be successfully applied inside and among organisations in a specific domain. In this case the CoP has lingered on after the completion of the LEARN project, which is a clear indication of a sustainable learning approach.

As already mentioned however, some of the small country projects did not meet the expectations set up beforehand. Several issues could explain this situation.

- In one of his publications Etienne Wenger[15], the main architect behind the CoP approach, elaborated on possible reasons for CoP not being so prevalent. According to Wenger one explanation is that "it is not particular easy to build and sustain CoP within the rest of the organisation". This fits quite well with the present

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[15] Etienne Wenger: "Communities of practice. a brief introduction – June 2006

context of VET in SEE countries where decentralisation and self-governance are still in an infancy phase.

- There were a number of very concrete constraints to networking at school level: many teachers (and principals) still lacked sufficient skills in English or proficiency with computers, due e.g. to the lack of IT equipment in schools. There were no incentives to promote extra-activities due to their economic situation: teachers often get only minimum salaries of 4-500 Euros, "just enough for existence, but not for enthusiasm".
- "Human factors" particular to the region should not be overlooked: due to a "strong ego", many people would not readily accept to learn from other "equals". Many school directors are also politically nominated, and would only follow instructions/advice from the MoE

4.4.3 CoP as a means to transfer good practices?

The long term objective of the LEARN project was to contribute to national capacity for VET policy formulation and implementation by strengthening the professional expertise of the recently established VET Centres.

The VET Centres are covered in section 4.3, hence focus here will solely be on the VET policy formulation and to what extent the CoP approach had a positive impact on this process.

The majority of the interviewed VET stakeholders (representatives from the Ministries, VET Centre staff and school managers) emphasized that the LEARN project provided a number of valuable contributions to their profession and understanding of VET implementation and policy. The following issues were highlighted.

- In seminars, workshop and study trips the participants were given the opportunity to share experiences and reflect on different systems and approaches;
- The networking which took place preferably during 'physical' meetings at seminars and workshops. As already referred to in this report, practically no networking took place on the web platform, in spite of an abundance of materials and supporting materials on the LEARN website. This was due to a lack of IT and language proficiency, poor access to the internet, but also to the fact that the CoP concept (especially web based) was new and had to be nurtured to achieve success.
- In BiH, the very different sectors of the schools selected for the CoP (agriculture, commerce, metal works), added to a web approach, may not have been conducive.

4.4.4 CoP as a means to create a common understanding of VET policy drivers?

CoP as a policy driver in the VET Centre and at the school level is covered in sections 4.3 and 4.5. Hence this sub-section will focus on a possible impact from the CoP approach, e.g. one of the functions of the Steering Committee which was to "develop as a driver for change that would promote mechanisms for support, incentives and self-regulation within country teams".[16]

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[16] Learning from LEARN, p. 18

The impact evaluation shall pay due respect to the fact that the network created was relatively small, that it operated over less than three years and in a context of diverse national priorities for educational policies and specifically within the VET area. Additionally the exercise of identifying "VET policy driver" must call for vigilance by abstaining from swift conclusions or speculative assessments.

The LEARN participants, specifically those dealing with VET policy formulation and implementation, underscored that the various workshops/courses/seminars and the direct networking with stakeholders from other countries had made a strong contribution to their own professional capacity. To what extent the networks had an impact on the VET policy is a complex matter. Nevertheless, the following findings tend to clearly indicate impact.

- The active and innovative performance of the VET Centre in Albania – NAVETA - has already been mentioned.
- CoP activities are still going on in Montenegro, focussing on school-based models for teacher training within key competences. This is implemented through the establishment of CoPs in selected pilot schools. It is notable that the "new" CoP is carried out in a close cooperation between the VET Centre and the Bureau for Educational Services. This cooperation was not in place in the E-portfolio project and may be one of the reasons for the problems encountered in the implementation phase.
- The CoP is included in the newly established ETF Thematic Expertise Development Department (TED). CoP is one of the instruments that TED is mobilising to achieve a number of project objectives.

To complete the picture of impact from the CoP, a number of obstacles, formulated by the interviewees themselves, should be exposed.

➢ As already stated, a lack of IT competences and language barriers, detrimental to electronic networking.
➢ A network – and even more so a CoP - can only become self-sustainable if there is a strongly perceived need to so, i.e. a common interest and objective ("You do not network for the sake of it"). This might have been the case in some instances, e.g. in BiH. A "challenge" may not be sufficient to do so; in the regional context there is still a need for a concrete project to set up and maintain a network.
➢ Particularly in the still fragmented context of the region, there is also a need for a designated coordinator/facilitator, who can assume leadership/support and provide regular inputs (information, topics for discussion etc) to feed the network between spaced workshops and seminars. This may not have been working optimally in the LEARN project, specifically in relation to the horizontal learning in networks.

4.5. School managers and teachers as drivers of change
Evaluation question E:

> *Do the school managers and teachers, who have been involved in the project, see themselves as drivers of change, who contribute to develop and mature ideas? Do other stakeholders see these school actors as bottom-up drivers of change?*

Introduction/context

The findings linked to this chapter originate to a great extent from the schools projects and other activities, which have already been presented country by country in chapter 4.2 (collective competence development. The findings concerning how managers and teachers see themselves will therefore not be presented here anymore on a country basis.

Instead, the evaluation approach will use a number of criteria, which constituted the methodological framework/basis for the preparation and implementation of the project, e.g. focusing on the new teacher roles in professional learning communities, and how the managers/teachers see themselves in this process.

4.5.1 Drivers of change – Teachers as learners

In spite of the fact that some of the school projects did not meet the intended objectives, it was noticeable that the managers/teachers interviewed wanted to take part in future school developing projects.

One message from the stakeholders met was clear, unequivocal and frequently delivered: "proper deliveries at the VET schools can only be achieved with teachers who have the motivation and are equipped in terms of both subject and pedagogical competences".

The LEARN project and ETF in general were seen as important drivers in this process, along with other projects/programs focussing on professional development of VET teachers. The case below, one of the project schools, provides a proper reflection of how teachers see themselves.

The Agricultural School in Kamza – Albania
The meeting started with two participants, the deputy head of the school and one of the teachers, who took part in the project. During the meeting more persons arrived, primarily explained by the fact that the newcomer could add information to the topic being discussed. At the end of the meeting we were 8 persons in a small office and sharing the genuine feeling that all wanted to contribute to the enthusiastic commitment to develop themselves, the students and the school.

4.5.2 Drivers of change – Needs of external support and continuity

Bearing in mind that the VET teacher profession has a low status and remuneration, the majority of the persons see themselves as "drivers of change" in the sense that they take pride in participating in new projects. Obviously the 10-20 % of the staff, who reportedly resisted new approaches and block changes, were not included in the interviews. It was remarkable that the teachers/school managers generally did not emphasize financial benefits as incentives for participating (Brcko in BiH was an exception), although low salaries and the lack of performance bonus are generally seen as obstacles to progress.

As already highlighted, it was generally acknowledged that much can be achieved even with a small amount of money. One feature that can however slow down or even impede projects is the replacement or lay-off of key persons. It appeared that school directors in the SEE countries are often replaced every five years. This happened at the agro-business

school in Korce, Albania, where the new director was not part of the "project based" learning project and consequently did only take poor ownership or interest in the continuation of the project.

The lack of support from the authorities, either the MoE or the VET agency, can also be a serious obstacle. When horizontal network building takes place at the community level, appropriate support from central level is decisive for a successful implementation. The case of the VET school "Spasoje Raspopovic", Podgorica – Montenegro clearly demonstrates this challenge.

The school was taking actively part in the E-portfolio project. Both the external (MOE) and the internal (self) evaluation documented that the school was performing quite well and the teaching staff was very enthusiastic about the long term perspectives in the project.
However, the project lost momentum when the support from the VET Centre stopped and the enthusiasm was replaced by a feeling of resignation. The school management perceived this as a negative policy learning experience, and expressed it in the following way**:** "They (the MoE) say thanks for the good work and goodbye and this is the end of the story".
In spite of this the school is keen on continuing the good work started, a stance which adds further dimensions to the concept "drivers of change".

4.5.3. Do other stakeholders see these school actors as bottom-up drivers of change?

It is difficult to provide an adequate answer to this question. The majority of the LEARN stakeholders outside the schools were often related to the projects in the sense that they provided some kind of support to the schools, either the VET agencies or the Ministry of Education. These persons praised the projects for being innovative and were supportive to changing the learning approaches.

Valuable inputs were also provided from stakeholders, who were not directly or indirectly involved in the school projects, e.g. VET specialists with knowledge about the LEARN project, and social partners. Obviously their knowledge about the projects was not thorough and consequently their assessments were more general than specific. These stakeholders highlighted that ETF projects had the potential to change the mind-set of VET teachers and that the inclusive approach often created conducive learning cultures.

4.6. Research function and Early Warning System

Evaluation question F:

How effective were the accompanying research function and the early warning system (EWS) which were utilised in the project?

Findings

According to the project LFA for 2007, the 2nd planned activity concerned the "setting up of an 'accompanying research' team (later transformed into a "function") from the region to follow and document project progression ("CoP" was added later) and advise on adaptations over the life cycle of the project". There were no further indications in the 2008 LFA on this issue, although the tasks were duly carried out until the end of the project.

The 'accompanying researcher' was another innovative approach of the project, aiming at the dual/ hybrid role of i) ensuring a regular and objective monitoring of progress, and ii) being at the same time an active contributor to the project by providing an informed inside-looking and solutions-oriented assessment capacity, based on an in-depth knowledge of the VET sector. Instant feedback – hence the "early warning" component - could be provided where examples of good or bad practices could be detected (e.g. poor presentation of seminar documents). The function also included ensuring the institutional memory and the visibility of the activities by producing reports, as well as contributing to a longer-term 'vision' capacity of ETF in the region. An underlying aspect included a lesson learning exercise, in order to prepare for the possible dissemination of the function to the various VET Centres.

The very knowledgeable expert, who fulfilled the function throughout the project, had been part of the teachers' training process in Albania for 18 years, and is still currently the Head of the NAVETA sector for curriculum development and teachers' training standards. As such, a particular challenge has been to be part of the overall LEARN team and not specifically of the Albanian one, to avoid any possible confusion of interest.

The research expert was present at most of the LEARN workshops and conferences, except those concerning the Steering Committee. He could therefore draft reports about each event in a timely manner and ensure the necessary accountability of the networking process. He has also prepared the ex-ante, mid-term and final reports for the project.

From this strategic point of view, the key positive aspects of ETF and LEARN included the following.

- The innovative approach of contributing to impacts both at school and policy levels, through the policy learning approach; although this process may be quite slow, the influence of LEARN contributed to starting such a trend.
- Although the project was not designed in itself to achieve practical work on e.g. changes in curricula, it did provide contributions through the very valuable exchanges of experience, and horizontal learning at the regional level and with the EU, with the assistance of highly qualified external experts.
- By establishing networks in particular between mid-level "doers" (e.g. VET Centres' managers and advisers), the project was able to set up positive and lasting contacts between e.g. Serbia and Kosovo (although this did not work so well with Croatia). The inputs of Turkey were also valuable, as they provided "another feeling and mentality".
- The project contributed to longer term "brain and heart" results, e.g. all concerned countries have adopted modules based on the project.

Among less favourable aspects (to be amended if possible in the future), the expert outlined e.g. the focus on web-based networking when many potential actors still did not have the necessary computer skills and internet access, and the long periods between the

main events without some kind of lower-level interim exchanges, which may have been carried out by a facilitator.

As detailed in the 'Learning from LEARN' document an commented by the researcher, his tasks focused however on the above-mentioned networking activities and did not extend e.g. to the monitoring of the small school projects - nor was this researcher formally trained in monitoring techniques for that purpose. The implementation problems encountered e.g. by the Mentoring project in Macedonia of the E-Platform in BiH could therefore not be detected in time.

4.7. Outcomes and spin-offs

Evaluation question G:

> *What were the outcomes and spin-offs of the project, among the outcomes of the long and joint learning processes supported by ETF, to foster increased awareness on how to organise VET learning processes in South East Europe?*

Context/introduction

In the methodology chapter it was highlighted that the stakeholders involved in the project between 2007 and 2009 had in most cases kept the LEARN project in mind, hence preserving the "institutional memory". This was helpful to this evaluation.

This is also the case when it comes to assessing the outcomes and spin-offs from the LEARN project. In addition it should be acknowledged that it was a complex task to demarcate an unequivocal impact from the LEARN project in terms of long term policy effects. This fact was also noted by the stakeholders themselves who, when interviewed, also frequently referred to other project/programs, e.g. the ETF SEE project. Still it was possible, as listed below, to identify a number of general findings.

In the methodology section, reference was made to the feedback to be obtained from the three countries which could not be included in the field visits, i.e. Croatia, Kosovo and Turkey. The separate interviews and e-mail surveys with the representatives of these countries focused on impact and spin-offs; some key findings from this additional feedback are recorded in the boxes below, whereas the results from the five visited countries are compiled in the general findings.

General findings

Outcomes of LEARN could be found in four of the five countries visited, at various levels (Serbia was not sufficiently involved in the project). Most of them have already been mentioned in the previous chapters and are summarised below.

Professional development of teachers in VET: some of the LEARN participants stressed that the project has been a "eye-opener" for them in terms of getting a better understanding of how the roles and responsibilities of teachers have changed during the last years. Teachers from schools where the planned school projects never materialised expressed a profound disappointment and even frustration. In spite of such negative experiences, the interviewees took a keen interest in future projects.

New learning approaches: the majority of the VET stakeholders who contributed to the evaluation were keen to continue to work with projects/activities that involve teachers in the actual planning. **Quote**: "The ETF experts listened to what we had to say and this contributed to the creation of a constructive atmosphere". Other stakeholders especially referred to the relationships of trust that was immanent during the course of the project and

already founded by the setting up of the SEE network in 2002. The relationship of trust especially between the ETF experts and the LEARN participants secured and nurtured a conducive context for networking and learning. At the same time it was acknowledged that development takes time and setbacks and hiccups are inevitable, as referred to in section 4.2.

Innovative approaches are not necessarily synonymous with large financial allocations: the VET stakeholders who participated in the evaluation were keen on implementing extensive pre- and in-service teacher training programs, but at the same time aware of the fact that financial constraints make this wishful thinking impossible. On this background the small school projects (even when they are not wholly successful) make useful contributions to professional development of teachers, especially when these activities are combined with networking activities. This approach is new and created both resistance and scepticism among several participants, although it was evident that a new culture is in the process of being established.

Learning material was developed in some cases, as a distinct outcome and spin-off of the project. In Albania, a booklet relating the PBL experience has been published to a large extent by NAVETA, which has also translated the lessons learned from PBL into the national curriculum. The PBL experience has furthermore been used in a wider project involving 10 new VET schools since 2009, with Swiss support. The project will have completed its piloting phase of 4 years in June 2013, and will then conduct a SWOT evaluation. A seminar with all involved teachers took place in February 2011 at NAVETA. In Turkey, course material which was developed during the project is reportedly being used by the In-service Department of the MoE.

Involvement of teachers in planning and decision making of learning process: a fundamental pillar in the ETF LEARN concept was the assumption that the success of VET reforms is closely linked to how teachers are involved in the planning and implementation of teaching. Seminars, workshops and school processes aimed at involving teachers in order to create engagement and ownership among the teachers. In spite of a culture traditionally based on centralization and top-down management, things are slowly moving. A school director expressed it with the following words: "Policy learning is among other things to give free hands".

It was a general assessment that VET teachers in the countries visited are enthusiastic about being involved in different kinds of learning processes/projects and not reluctant to take responsibility. This forms a sharp contrast to the low reputation of VET in society and the small remuneration of VET teachers. In some respects the teachers seemed to be ahead of the governmental institutions, a mismatch which can lead to either frustrations or development on own initiatives, both cases were observed during the mission. The innovative and driving culture was especially, and not surprisingly, noticeable at the innovative schools, where the culture was nurtured by devoted headmasters, inspired by both ETF and other interventions targeting school development.

The case of Croatia Interview by Skype, September 29.
The person interviewed participated to the SEE network (2003-07) and was a short term consultant in the LEARN project. From 1995-2010 she was employed in two vocational schools in Croatia. Since 2010 she has been working as consultant in various EU financed projects in Croatia.
The interviewee drew attention to 2 specific outcomes from her participation in LEARN activities:
1. the professional outcomes;
2. the personal outcomes.
Professional outcomes: the information and innovative learning approaches provided at the workshops constituted the foundation for her professional development. She has managed to transfer and disseminate the skills and competences achieved from the project into her present activities, e.g. VET teacher training, preparing curricula and quality assurance.
She is regularly contacted and contracted by the VET agency and she sees this as a valid evidence of creating an impact on VET implementation in Croatia. Finally she highlighted the networking activities as a means to get and deliver inspiration. After the completion of the LEARN project, she is still in contact with others SEE stakeholders.
Personal outcomes: She values the good cooperation and open atmosphere that always was an essential part of the LEARN activities: **Quote: "**Maybe the best thing I have learned through the years with ETF was to communicate with people with smile and good will in all situations. It really helped me a lot".

Kosovo
Two persons were interviewed by the team leader on August 24th in Kosovo:
-the head of the VET Division at the Ministry of Education of Kosovo (MEST);
-the Component Unit Manager in the Danida MEST project "Employment through business and skills development".
Both persons participated in the LEARN project and are playing important roles in the Kosovo VET reform process. The points listed below are a compilation of the feedback from the two interviewees.
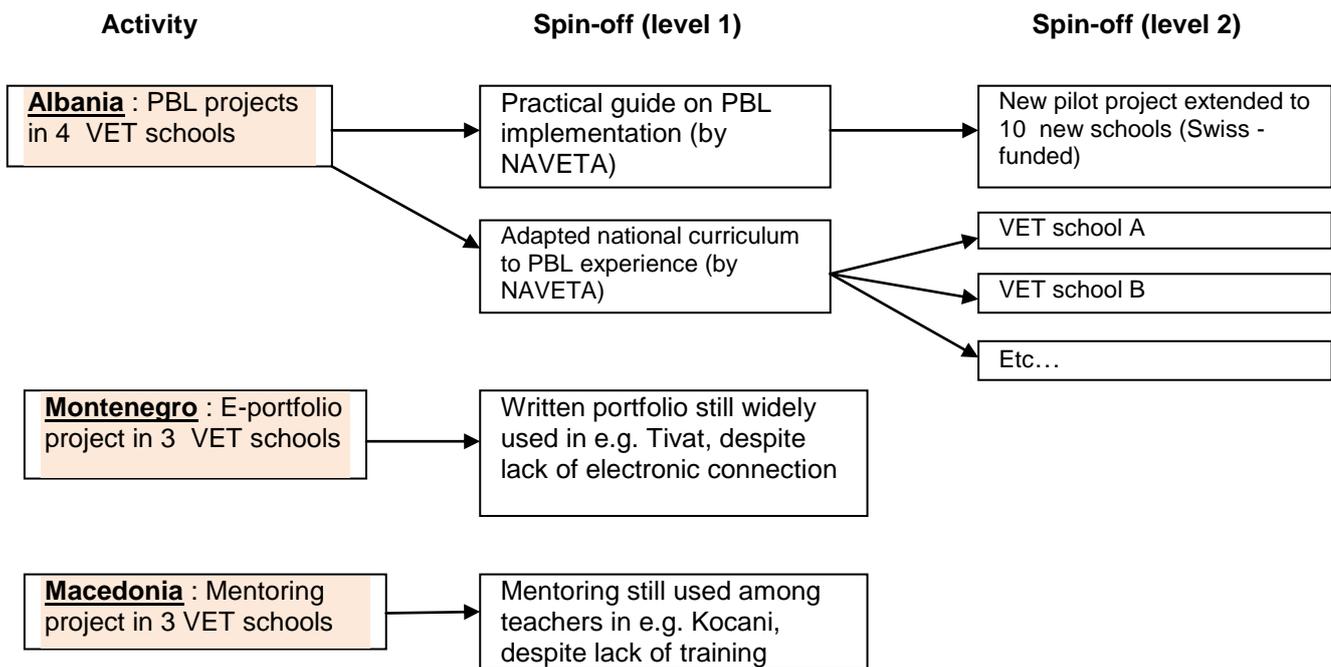
- The LEARN project gave a lot of valuable information, which they have transferred into the Kosovo context. The present amendment of the VET law was a concrete example of how they can make practical use of lessons learnt.
- A collective learning process was established during the seminars and study visits. The head of the VET Division in MEST specifically highlighted that the ETF/LEARN workshops/seminars presented different solutions/ways in an open and unprejudiced atmosphere. She compared this approach with other donor interventions. Quote: "Sometimes I have the feeling that we are overloaded with various VET approaches, of course offered in the best sense. We need to find our own way"
- Lessons learnt about the VET centres and councils: like in the other SEE countries, the VET council in Kosovo is not performing according to the political objectives. Common challenges can contribute to better solutions and to new ways of addressing social partners' involvement in VET.
- Both interviewees underscored the massive need for professional development of VET teachers. Several analyses have documented the lack of pre-and in-service training for VET teacher[17]. Like other SEE countries, Kosovo is preparing a teacher license system. The LEARN approach has been an inspiration in this process. This w*ill also be*

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[17] Jørgen Ole Larsen:"Fact finding study – VET teacher training in Kosovo", October 2011 and ETF: "Mapping policies and practices for the preparation of teachers for inclusive education n contexts of social and cultural diversity" – January 2010

Due to the often complex institutional and political settings and the weak capacity for self governance while facing still centralised government authorities, clearly attributable and concrete spin-offs from the LEARN project were not numerous, and were mostly related to the most practical activities, i.e. the innovative (or small national) school projects. A synthetic overview of such spin-offs is provided in the diagram below.

Diagram 2

Activity	Spin-off (level 1)	Spin-off (level 2)
Albania : PBL projects in 4 VET schools	Practical guide on PBL implementation (by NAVETA)	New pilot project extended to 10 new schools (Swiss - funded)
	Adapted national curriculum to PBL experience (by NAVETA)	VET school A
		VET school B
		Etc…
Montenegro : E-portfolio project in 3 VET schools	Written portfolio still widely used in e.g. Tivat, despite lack of electronic connection	
Macedonia : Mentoring project in 3 VET schools	Mentoring still used among teachers in e.g. Kocani, despite lack of training	

5. Key Conclusions

As stated in chapter 2.1 and in Annex 1.A, the LEARN project has proposed a relatively complex approach, based simultaneously on the interlocking development of policy learning, CoPs, VET Centres and teacher training through innovative projects.

The project was based in particular on a peer-learning approach with a focus on how to organise policy learning platforms and environments within and between platforms. The project was further planning to test the principle of CoP in transition countries.

This approach was translated in the LFA through a set of 4 specific objectives, the initial formulation of which was rather ambitious considering the limited resources of the project.

In addition, the project was implemented in the challenging framework of a still unstable regional background, where the poor economic situation of the VET sector, the frequent political turmoil and subsequent ministerial changes, and the still strong centralising policies were not conducive to achieving impacts. The VET Centres (or the equivalent institutions) which were meant to be the national "anchors" of the LEARN project, were still nascent and fragile. They were evolving at different stages of development and with widely varying levels of authority and resources, which further constituted a challenge for the consistent implementation of the project.

The evaluation was able to define some consistent patterns of findings, which have led to a number of key conclusions. These have been collected below in three main sections:
- Policy Learning;
- added value in terms of promoting innovative learning approaches and nurturing new VET teacher roles; and
- the ETF approach – CoP

5.1. Policy Learning

Regarding the concept of policy learning, the LEARN project has, in compliance with an earlier ETF Advisory Forum endorsement, adhered to the definition made by Raffle and Spours: "the ability of governments or systems of governance to inform policy development by drawing lessons from available evidence and experience"[18]. This definition has been used as a framework for some of the following conclusions.

VET policymakers/stakeholders and policy learning
As already outlined, VET policies and implementation differ in the countries which have participated in the LEARN project. In spite of these differences, the various policymakers/ stakeholders have consistently highlighted a number of key areas in the policy learning process.
- **Sharing of a common past**

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[18] Raffle and Spours. "Policy-making and policy learning"- London 2007

In spite of the present divergences in the VET systems, the participants are sharing a past which presents more similarities than differences in their educational systems. This has served as a joint platform to discuss and exchange views on themes and problems of common interest.

- **Learning from other countries**
  The study trips to countries with advanced VET systems not only served as an "eye-opener" but also as inspirational inputs to qualify the policy discussions both in their own country and in the region. Reference has already been made to the feedback from the VET representative from Kosovo, who highlighted the benefits from discussing current experiences and possible solutions to common challenges in the VET policy implementation.

- **Learning from innovation**
  Policy learning at the school/teacher level in terms of promoting and adapting new approaches depends heavily from external/central support. This was noticeably measured by the achievements of the country schools projects. Lack of support and involvement from the VET Centre and MoE may lead to frustration and demotivation and hence to a poor outcomes (Macedonia), as compared to the effects in Albania of a committed national policy (for the last 2 years) and a VET Centre which has (relatively) managed to secure its legal basis and budget. ETF can obviously not be held accountable for such developments, but useful lessons need to be learnt regarding conducive pre-existing criteria for organising future school projects.

  In spite of the mixed outcome from the school projects, the general feedback was that the policymakers/stakeholders have achieved useful lessons/tools in terms of promoting professional development of VET schools and teachers. The ongoing CoP activities in Montenegro are a visible proof of this process as well as other ETF learning projects based on the CoP principles.

VET centres and policy learning
The findings clearly indicate that the VET centres operate in different and often unstable VET policy environments, which obviously have an impact on their freedom of manoeuvre. The LEARN project rightly advocated that the VET centres in the SEE countries should prepare their own strategic plans, composed from a common template.

Although some of the goals and expected results still seem far away from current situations, they represent a framework for both present and long term activities. In spite of the difficulties, all stakeholders agree that VET Centres in future need to have a more influential role in VET implementation. The ETF LEARN approach based on providing inspiration, networking and exchange of experiences - contrary to imposing policies - can currently only be seen as "windows of opportunities", pending further political changes. The positive development of NAVETA in Albania clearly demonstrates the usefulness of the ETF approach.

Policy leaning in the sense that the LEARN project made an impact on how the participants see themselves is obviously a complex issue. Although many of the interviewees see themselves as "drivers of change" and mention that the LEARN project has contributed to this process, it can still be difficult to identify specific changes gained from the project.

5.2. Added value in terms of promoting innovative learning approaches and nurturing new VET teacher roles.

Introduction and familiarisation of innovative learning approaches and new teacher roles have materialised at two levels:1) impact from the regional and international CoP activities, and 2) impact from the small school based projects.

The stakeholders who participated in the regional and international workshops/seminars highlighted the open and undogmatic atmosphere of these arrangements. The VET experts providing presentations were praised for not trying to impose their own systems on the participants - a delicate balance which is often a challenge for professionals, who are dedicated and proud of their own systems.

As already highlighted, the outcomes from the school projects varied very much, ranging from success stories that radically changed the mindset and perception of the involved teachers, to schools where they never started, incidents which consequently caused disappointment and frustration.

Where the small country projects were (partly) successful - or even sometimes where they seem to have failed -, these projects appear nevertheless to have provided a significant contribution to the capacity building of the school and the collective competence development, by changing mindsets towards the need of reform and opening to new approaches.

Finally, according to VET schools which had been involved in the LEARN small national projects in various countries (Kamza in Albania, Niksic in Montenegro) - and were adequately supported by their national VET centre -, a key added value of ETF lies in the cost-effectiveness of its approach (see also Annex A.2). With limited resources, ETF has managed to achieve significant effects by concentrating not on equipment (where large amounts of money can easily be wasted) but on developing activities that change mentalities and nurture a new awareness. *Quote*: "if you lose, it is only a small loss, but if change occurs, it can be big". Cost-effectiveness ratios could however not be accurately determined (Annex 1.B).

5.3. The ETF approach – CoP

The ETF LEARN approach was perceived as very relevant and much appreciated by not trying to impose concepts and solutions, but letting local actors imagine options by themselves, with the assistance of networking for exchanging ideas, and as such promoting ownership and commitment.

This approach was based on the principles that CoP should function as an instrument for network learning and with the overarching objective to establish a platform, where the participants could meet and learn from one another. As stressed in the LEARN background papers, the intention was not to introduce and carry out a specific HR approach. On the contrary the intention was to provide the participants with "space" and opportunities to develop and be inspired in a fruitful learning atmosphere.

The added value of this "soft" ETF approach was compared by several stakeholders against other, multi- and unilateral, donor interventions, where the beneficiaries often experience limited influence on the preparation and implementation of activities. Without jumping to swift conclusions one can claim that this approach was seen by the participants as diametrically opposed to formerly centralised management structures.

In this context, the skills of the staff and international experts of ETF dedicated to the project were universally highly appreciated. The professional, proficient and friendly atmosphere was often highlighted by the LEARN participants.

It was emphasized that the ETF SEE TT and LEARN networking has been most effective as it covered all countries of the region with similar set ups in each country. The networking contributed to mixing stakeholders at all levels (MoE, universities, school directors and teachers), and putting them in contact with each other and with EU actors. The network still operates today, but would benefit from continuous support.

There may be a need for a longer term strategic vision beyond the horizon of successive projects – which was one of the expected inputs of the researcher - but from the point of view of local actors there was no issue of lack of coherence between LEARN and later ETF projects (Mutual Learning etc).The field actors perceived on the contrary (and appreciated) a distinct ETF continuity through e.g. a similar approach logic (with some overlaps), the collaboration with the same community actors, and the same terminology.

The networking however happened essentially in the course of the direct contacts established during workshops etc, rather than through the intended web-based media. Only few of the LEARN participants declared to have had knowledge of the ETF web-site and no one (among those met by the evaluation) made use of it. As a result, networking between the main events, as well as activities among the country teams and the project teams, was somewhat limited.   On the other hand it was a common finding that the participants received and read ETF project materials.

At school level, recurrent constraints to web-based communication derived from the lack of IT skills, English proficiency, or sufficient access to the internet. In the much fragmented political context of BiH, the diversity of the courses taught by the selected VET schools did not appear to have been conducive either to creating and maintaining a web-based CoP between VET schools located in three different entities. In these respects, lessons may have to be retained for the design of possible future school projects.

6. Key Recommendations

The recommendations below either derive from the conclusions developed in the previous chapter, or were formulated explicitly by key stakeholders and were consistent with patterns of findings. The structure will accordingly include three key areas:

1. *The VET Centres*
2. *Professional development of VET teachers*
3. *The LEARN approach – CoP as a project vehicle*

6.1.   The VET Centres and policy learning

In spite of the mixed performance and capacity of the VET Centres it is recommended to continue the support to these Centres. From EU countries it is recognized and documented that the development of robust and effective VET management systems takes time and demands support from stakeholders outside the traditional education system. Experiences also indicate that when these structures start to be effective, the quality of VET deliveries increases accordingly.

The countries in the region have taken different approaches to the institutional development of VET Centres in support of the VET reform process. This is also expressed in diverse set ups of the individual centre and the authority they have been provided with, e.g. top-down approach and bottom-up approach. Whatever organisation the countries adhere to, it appears essential that VET Centres can play a role in improving VET deliveries and development. The good example of Albania advocates for continuous support to the Centres.

Obviously the VET Centres are not supposed to develop into teacher training/pedagogical institutes, which are already in place in the SEE countries. One of the key characteristics of VET Centres is that they are supposed to serve as the coordinating body between the main stakeholders in VET: the Ministry of Education, the social partners and the schools/teachers. In that key position VET centres can contribute to professional development of VET teachers and schools. Good practices and experiences from the LEARN project and especially Albania provide the inspiration and fundament for possible future projects.

The long term objective defined by LEARN in 2007, i.e. to contribute to the national capacity for VET policy formulation and implementation by strengthening the professional expertise of the VET Centres, is still valid and at the same time closely linked to a policy learning process. Policy learning is, as highlighted above, perceived and exploited in a broad sense, hence the recommendations for the VET Centres to be seen in a policy learning framework.

Key recommendations would therefore be to:

- continue supporting the VET Centres by involving them in further networking with examples of good practice in the EU, and

- updating and pursuing their strategic planning - which had first been formulated in 2009 as a conclusion to LEARN -, by aiming in particular at gaining more self-governance and setting up adequate legal basis, and as practical coordinators of school projects.

VET Centres to promote self-governance and decentralisation
References have been made to the open and constructive feedback from the school managers/teachers, expressing their will and commitment to act as "drivers of change". It is recommended to initiate projects that focus on self-governance and decentralisation of VET schools and with the VET Centre in a coordinating and monitoring role.

A project which focuses on self-governance and decentralisation is consistent with the former LEARN school approach. It is envisaged that such a project becomes a joint venture between a number of networking VET schools and the VET Centres. The focal point of the decentralisation project is how the schools in close cooperation with VET Centre can identify areas for self development and improve the links between the school and the VET Centre.

A project targeting self-governance and decentralisation would furthermore serve two important policy learning objectives:
1. The VET Centre would learn important lessons from how schools operate within a number of areas, and hence improve its own capacity to support individual schools. At the central level, this process would streamline the quality of its advices and policy formulation.
2. The VET schools participating in the projects would be supported in and encouraged to embark on activities that go beyond their traditional working procedures and routines.

The decentralisation project could include areas like continuous professional development of VET teachers, quality assurance of VET deliveries, and setting up and maintaining networks. Such activities could also e.g. materialise in a self-governance handbook that could be disseminated to other schools, such as the manual for project work prepared in Albania.

A project of this kind would comply with the basic rationale for the LEARN project by focussing on capacity building, school based learning and supporting learning communities. Finally, the costs incurred by such an activity would not be extensive compared to the expected returns.

Social dialogue partnerships in VET Delivery – New roles for VET Centres
One of the strengths of successful demand-driven approaches in VET is the active participation of social partners in the design and implementation of programmes. Involving employers and trade unions by institutional means in assessing rapidly changing requirements of labour markets and designing programmes that respond to employment and workplace needs, is widely perceived to be necessary to VET systems' responsiveness. The VET Centres in transition countries are expected to play a significant role in that process.

In spite of the obvious need for consultations with social partners in the shape of central and local councils, it is well documented that only a small proportion of VET policies in the region emerges from active dialogue with representatives from the labour market. The

process of providing forums for consultations with social partners is still at an early stage and responds to different features in the various countries.

In the light of the above, it is recommended that ETF supports the VET Centres in improving the links to labour market representatives and that this support duly reflects the present (weak) state of the tri-partite dialogue. The following scope of ETF, national and local, supported initiatives could serve as combined policy learning and social dialogue activities:

NQF as a platform for development of further cooperation: representatives from the industry have to a great extent contributed to setting up NQF in the SEE countries, and hence a platform for further collaboration has been established. ETF has been active in the process of introducing and implementing EQF in the national context. NQF can be perceived as a scholastic concept far from the "world of work" but has the potential to serve as relevant indicators for quality in education. The cooperative approach obtained in the NQF development could be further developed by a supporting project where NQF would be seen as a tool to assess the quality of a certain profession. The VET Centre would be expected to play a mediating and promoting role in such a process, and ETF could - on a small scale basis - support these activities.

Reinventing apprentice systems- while VET is predominantly school based across the region, workplace learning and apprentice systems have been the object of increasing attention among the SEE countries. This is also reflected in the VET Centres' strategies, p.59 in the LEARN publication. This increased awareness on practical training coincides with EU initiatives to reinvent/reinforce apprentice systems in order to improve the overall competitiveness of the Union. Apprentice systems and practical training call for close cooperation between the "world of school" and the "world of work". ETF could contribute to the process of promoting this cooperation by setting up networking and peer learning activities among the national partners, as well as through inputs from countries with advanced apprentice systems.

6.2   Professional development of VET teachers

The SEE countries are gradually becoming more and more integrated in a European context, a process which will be finalised when they are admitted in the EU. This growing connection to EU countries will gradually put focus on the educational systems' capacity to respond to labour market demands for skilled labour. As pointed out in the LEARN publication one major prerequisite for providing skilled labour will be the proficiency of the VET schools and the teachers.

This development will obviously require several reforms and changes and more specifically that:
- the schools are enabled and allowed to open up to the local society and labour market;
- new learning theories and approaches are supported;
- the teachers are allowed to take initiatives in establishing local teacher training activities.

The LEARN approach activities had a high priority of opening up of the schools in terms of giving them more responsibility and participation in development of staff competences. The essence of the activities, building upon the former EFT VET TT network, both represented by the school projects and innovative approaches presented in workshops and seminars, had focused on developing schools into learning organisations.

In spite of the mixed outcome it is highly recommended to continue the school developing projects. Even participants from schools, where the projects did not materialise into actual activities, emphasize the usefulness and value of small developing projects.

Professional development of teachers and school management is one of the most important outcomes from networking among local and regional VET schools. It is strongly recommended to continue and further develop networking among schools and teachers. The CoP principles (further elaborated below) are a suitable and relevant approach to deploy in future ETF school networks. Furthermore, learning by networking should be seen as an extremely cost effective feature in VET systems which are faced with strong constraints in the provision of (financial) resources.

Even if some discrepancies of networking projects can be tolerated because of the limited expenses incurred by this kind of projects, it is recommended that future networking projects should be subject to careful planning procedures. This should include some initial phases (basic fact-finding activities followed by a approval), before taking a final decision on what the project should support/promote.

Closely linked to this recommendation is the need to develop more institutional capacity with the aim to secure the momentum and continued existence of project activities. Stakeholders in the school projects highlighted that much could be achieved for a small amount of money and remuneration of a local project coordinator could be a solution to this challenge.

Hence it is recommended to enhance school networking by supporting a broadening of the dialogue (through internet, workshops etc) between the concerned schools and (i) other schools operating in similar VET sectors (business, agriculture etc) in the region, and in the EU (for possible twinning).

It is furthermore recommended in that framework to reinforce future school development projects and networking activities by training some individuals, who could serve as 'ambassadors for drivers of change' – i.e. focal points for networking at school level. Handing over more responsibility to national (school-based) participants can also serve the general purpose of creating more ownership among the beneficiaries and hence nurturing the process of self-governance.

The E-portfolio project was not an absolute success. Still both the schools and the VET centre in Montenegro emphasized the potentials of such a system. The linkage between a future teacher licensing system and E-portfolio seems obvious. It is envisaged that a teacher license system mainly will deal with the registration of factual information, e.g. the

teachers personal data, educational background, seniority etc. Hence the integration of E-portfolio with a teacher license system could support managerial considerations and improve communication, learning and networking activities. Finally the E-portfolio could serve as a personal portfolio where teachers save and monitor their own "credits" obtained by participating in school developing projects. In this context it is recommended to revitalize the E-portfolio project.

6.3 The LEARN approach – CoP as a project vehicle

The LEARN project made use of and tested the principle of participating in CoP. As highlighted in the findings and the conclusions, the project succeeded to a high degree except for the web-based CoP, which never operated according to the objectives.

As a project vehicle, CoP turned out to be suitable to the planned activities in a national and regional environment and with countries in a transition phase. CoP is not a complicated tool, nor is it expensive compared to other VET interventions. SEE countries are in a dire need to develop their educational systems and priorities have to be made with limited financial resources. For that purpose CoP was/is an appropriate tool to deploy.

One prerequisite for a successful CoP implementation is participants who want to take part in order to improve their own standards and deliveries. This was the case for the majority of persons involved in LEARN activities, and even in situations where the projects never materialised beyond the planning stage. Projects have demonstrated their capacity to provide additional capacity building and morale boosting to both VET Centres and concerned schools.

Hence it is recommended to continue using CoP as the approach in learning and competence development projects. This has already been done in projects after 2009, e.g. the continuation of the LEARN CoP in Montenegro and National COP in Bosnia and Herzegovina. To this date, none of these activities have been evaluated.

A crucial issue/challenge will however be the principles for designing CoPs. Successful project management of communities of practice requires solid preparation. When some of the LEARN activities turned into "not-working" projects it could be explained by lack of proper planning and absence of a common understanding of the project rationale and the principles involved in a CoP.

It is recommended that all projects start with a robust planning phase in which all potential participants are involved from the very beginning. Further, it is advised that all projects, before commencing and as part of the design, include a kind of "collective charter"/memorandum of understanding. Such a charter could include issues such as:

- the rationale and scope of the network;
- the key roles (facilitator, sponsor etc.);
- the expectations in terms of participants' time commitment;
- a "code of conduct" – how members will work together and key processes/tools; and
- a sense of "what success looks like, e.g. performance indicators.

To ensure the sustainability and optimum use of networking it should be considered to appoint and remunerate local/regional CoP facilitators to organise network meetings, maintain (or "stimulate") from time to time the network between bigger events (seminars, conferences) through low-level inputs (information, topics for discussion), disseminate materials and monitor the effectiveness of the network.

In addition, the facilitator could act as good-will ambassador for introducing and promoting school learning projects linked in networking activities. In this context it should further be considered to rotate the facilitator role. The benefit of a CoP is the free flowing and exchange of different ideas and approaches. CoPs need to acknowledge and reflect that one or two members are not always planning or leading the various activities. Allowing a minority to control and direct the CoP can limit additional ideas and lead to burnout. In the LEARN project a well functioning facilitator might have been able to secure some of the school projects that were not working or alternatively decided to discontinue the project.

The web-based CoP was used to a very limited extent. Language barriers and insufficient provision of IT facilities or access to internet seem to be the main reasons for this situation. Other projects share the same experiences when it comes to setting up communication platforms among partners from different countries and institutional contexts.

Still, other projects document that if people become interested in a good and common cause it is not so complicated to establish web networking activities. Hence the small outcome from the LEARN web-platform should not lead to a total abandonment of the principle. Instead it should be considered to operate on a more limited scale hence escaping language problems. In addition it could be considered to use other social media like Facebook etc. Schools selected to take part in small projects should also be more adequately supported, where necessary, in terms of IT skills and English language proficiency, e.g. through training.

The approach of the accompanying researcher, which has been highly valuable for the accountancy of networking under LEARN, should be reinforced by providing training in monitoring and evaluation to the concerned expert(s), extending the scope of their activities to school projects, and defining a status which would guarantee the independence of their function within VET Centres.