

ETF ACTION PLAN IN RESPONSE TO THE EUROPEAN COMMISSION'S COMMUNICATION (N°832 of 19/12/2006)

The third external evaluation of the European Training Foundation was completed in May 2006¹. The evaluation was conducted by external evaluators (ITAD Ltd) on behalf of the European Commission. The final results of the evaluation were presented to the Governing Board members in June 2006. Please find in annex the executive summary of the ITAD Report.

Following the external evaluation, the European Commission has published on 19/12/06 a Communication on the European Training Foundation to the European Parliament, the Council, and the Economic and Social Committee. The Communication presents the Commission's opinion on the outcomes of the external evaluation process, and puts forward a number of recommendations for improvement. Through the Communication, the Commission invites the ETF to draw up an action plan in response to the recommendations in the ITAD report as well as in the Communication itself.

The ETF welcomes both the recommendations of the external evaluators and those of the Commission included in its Communication. To ensure a comprehensive response to the recommendations and a proper planning of corrective measures, the ETF has drafted an Action Plan which integrates:

- Recommendations of the external evaluation
- Recommendations of the European Commission
- ETF comments and proposed action
- Time-frame over the next two years.

The ETF will report on the implementation of the Action Plan to the Governing Board according to the following schedule which is timed to coincide with the normal calendar of Board meetings:

- Progress Report June 2007
- Progress Report November 2007
- Progress Report June 2008
- Final Report November 2008

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¹ The first two evaluations took place in 1998 and 2002.

Executive Summary (ITAD)

Introduction

1. This Final Report presents the findings, conclusions and recommendations of the Interim Evaluation of the European Training Foundation (ETF). The study, which was undertaken at the request of DG Education and Culture of the European Commission, is a statutory requirement of ETF which stipulates the use of external experts as a necessary exercise in good governance.
2. The evaluation methodology and approach have been developed around the comprehensive Terms of Reference (Annex 2), which includes at its core a series of “key evaluation questions”. The Team drew up an Evaluation Framework (Annex 1) to guide the study with key questions being matched to different stakeholder groups. The evaluation itself comprised a document review, then a series of semi-structured interviews and group working sessions with ETF staff and representatives of the Commission in Brussels. This was followed by visits to Croatia, Jordan, Tajikistan and Ukraine, the four case study partner countries selected to represent the regions served by ETF.
3. The Interim Evaluation Report (December 2005) presented the findings of ETF and Brussels interviews and the results of the case study country assessments in some detail. Since this report was submitted, a considerable amount of additional information has been analysed and synthesised. This includes an analysis of interviews with representatives of the Governing Board, observations on the Governing Board meeting itself, as well as the analysis and reporting on the Web Survey results. This additional information has significantly assisted in informing this evaluation.
4. The evaluation has been characterised as “forward looking” thus while it has assessed performance over the period 2002 – 2005, the focus has been on those questions which are particularly relevant to the future programme. At all stages during the process, the Evaluation Team has received excellent cooperation from ETF, participating stakeholders in the different agencies and in partner countries. Regular meetings with the DGEAC and the Steering Group, two reports and a presentation to the Governing Board in November 2005 and at a meeting to review the draft final report in February 2006 have ensured that significant consultation has taken place at regular points throughout this study.

Key Findings

POLICY AND STRATEGY

5. ETF’s role as a centre of expertise in contributing to the development of vocational education and training in Candidate Countries, Eastern Europe, the Caucasus and Central Asia, the Western Balkans and the Southern and Eastern Mediterranean has evolved over time since its beginnings in 1990. It now delivers a more focused set of services with clear policy objectives, articulated in the Mid Term Perspective and Work Programme Planning documents, which vary by region.
6. External Relations Policy: there is currently a range of external relations policies which potentially influence the work of the Foundation. These include enlargement, European Neighbourhood Policy (ENP), development, external assistance and external trade. The evaluation is concerned however, that the EC is explicitly giving priority to the ENP and towards those countries now negotiating for accession to the EC, that the EC development policy agenda (which affects ETF partner countries in Central Asia and MEDA in particular), does not appear to rank high in importance. This is in spite of the EC having signed up to the main plank of development policy, i.e. the eradication of extreme poverty.
7. The scope of the sectoral / thematic remit: for the period under review, the remit of ETF as contained in the regulatory mechanism has been interpreted with some flexibility by both the Commission Services and ETF also to include the principle of linking Vocational Education and Training (VET) to the labour market. It follows that ETF has been successful in recognising the links of VET to the improving education levels generally, increasing

employment opportunities, skills development and its contribution to poverty reduction where poverty is a national issue.

8. Alignment with the European Union (EU) and country strategies: the evaluation found that ETF's programmes were in line with both EU and individual country strategies, recognising that ETF (especially in smaller countries) is able to assist and inform through a process of "policy learning" in developing and shaping the direction the reform might take.

9. Geographic remit: While most of ETF's partner countries now fall under the ENP or are candidate (or potential candidate) countries, with the remainder being in Central Asia, the question arises as to whether ETF should work outside this defined geographic area. A similar argument also applies to the question of whether ETF should broaden its client base. By so doing, the EU might increase its return from ETF's resources through a more effective utilisation of ETF's expertise.

10. Prioritisation between countries: the evaluation was concerned that there was a missing mechanism to guide prioritisation of interventions between countries. The challenge for ETF is to devise an appropriate system of allocation between (and within) countries, which does not become overly formulaic or inflexible.

MARKET POSITIONING AND SUPPORT TO THE COMMISSION

Added Value

11. ETF is classified as an EU decentralised agency, and in effect operates as a specialised sub-contractor to the European public service. The evaluation assessed the "added value" of using ETF's expertise compared to outsourcing to a consultancy or academic based organisation from a number of different perspectives.

12. Across a range of stakeholders, in particular Commission Services, added value was attributed to the sustainability of the Foundation (in terms of long term perspective, institutional memory and communication of knowledge); to it having an EU perspective (and knowledge of EU processes); its network of experts in the Agency, in Member States and in international organisations; its rapid response to requests and a visibility and credibility as an institution active in VET.

13. Looking at added value from the perspective of the costs of ETF staff compared to other EU decentralised agencies, ETF emerged as one of the lowest cost organisations (using 2001 data from a study commissioned by DG Budgets).

14. Among many national stakeholders, the added value is access to a sharing of European ideas on VET which ETF provides through its seminars, working groups and projects. ETF's role as a niche player in the VET sector, with its ability to network between different players in VET reform have given it prominence and influence with which an independent contractor would find difficult to compete.

15. Support to the Commission: from the perspective of both the Commission Services in Brussels and the Delegations, the contribution of ETF is perceived as very positive as it brings value to its users through provision of expertise in VET and Human Resource Development (HRD) across a range of services. However, the perception is that ETF could still be improved if there was clearer information (or dissemination of information) on the objectives of ETF as an institution and per country, and on the monitoring activities and impact of ETF initiatives.

16. Complementing other VET interventions: ETF works in a sector where expertise and other bilateral aid are limited so that duplication and overlap of effort is uncommon. ETF, through its own projects and National Observatory Functions complements other Agency work in the sector through information provision, in making available its core products, as well as sharing its country assessments and thematic approaches.

17. The evaluation concluded that ETF expertise could be made available to Member States and the EU Parliament if requested, provided that separate funding was agreed and on condition that existing (mainstream) programmes were not negatively affected.

EFFECTIVENESS AND EFFICIENCY

18. Planning, Monitoring and Evaluation: the evaluation found that while in the Annual Work Programme (i.e. the planning document) specific objectives and results expected were clearly stated, the reporting of actual results (mainly through the quarterly reporting process) provides a commentary on progress and on what activities have been completed, but does not assess performance.

19. The Country Plan document, summarising the planned programme for each country is a welcome addition to the planning process. However, detailed plans on a “project-by-project” basis are not easily accessible or standardised. Detailed project plans are not normally written up with performance indicators or arrangements for project monitoring.

Achievement of Work Programmes Objectives

20. In the evaluation, a distinction was made between the assessment of the work supporting the EU Commission and EU funded programmes, and the results of ETF’s expertise and its own portfolio of projects. While it is difficult to generalise across the case study countries, in the three de-concentrated delegations in the provision of support activities to the Commission were satisfactorily carried out. In most cases this was to a very high standard of efficiency. In the case of Croatia, the lack of policy ownership and direction by Government was limiting the effectiveness of ETF’s work. In Ukraine, in a more developed policy environment, while concerns remain, there are now significant opportunities for substantially reforming the VET system. In Tajikistan, starting from a low base, where many of the projects are quite new, it was difficult to judge how effective they will be.

21. The National Observatory Projects (NOPs): NOPs were established in the majority of partner countries (except the MEDA region) originally as information providers. They have now evolved their role to one of a more direct involvement in the VET reform process. The Observatory functions in the MEDA region (working through existing agencies) take on a different form with the emphasis aimed at supporting decision-making.

22. Seen more as an institutional building exercise originally, the National Observatory Projects (NOP) relies heavily on the one or two individuals who staff it. Although the role of the NOP was evolving, there was concern that there was no clear strategic vision for OP’s in the early stages. However, with the need to conform to competition guidelines in the EU in the tendering or awarding of NOP contracts, the process is undergoing change. Under the new arrangements of competitive bidding, the role and responsibilities of the former NOP would be split, with two tenders to identify service providers for events and contracting local experts. There is concern that this may not help in developing the capacity of NOPs and nor is it clear how the two entities will cooperate in the future.

Monitoring and Evaluation

23. Monitoring systems: ETF has a comprehensive reporting and higher level monitoring system, geared both to statutory reporting as well as monitoring for internal management purposes. The Foundation reports on performance of its main strands of work (support to the CEC, information and analysis and development) by region. The centralised monitoring of ETF services at country level is, however, limited to brief activity progress reporting in Quarterly Reports, with more detailed arrangements on monitoring country programmes left to Regional Managers to develop and manage. The current programme planning structure does not at present facilitate the development of project level monitoring arrangements reporting on a country-by-country basis, although opportunities will exist from 2007 to incorporate project level monitoring, with appropriate performance indicators on a systematic basis.

24. The development of monitoring systems for ETF activities is potentially a complex area, given the nature of ETF projects, with the Foundation’s experts often acting as facilitators of a process, with project results and outcomes difficult to quantify. In spite of these acknowledged difficulties, it was found that where performance information is available, it is not systematically collected or reported on. The time-tagging (time sheet system) which was being piloted at the time of the evaluation is an extremely important development, which should radically improve the quality of information on the “input” side. The challenge is to

develop an approach that provides meaningful “result” information on ETF activities, services and interventions at country level and on the services provided directly to the Commission.

25. Communication and dissemination: The assessment concluded that ETF has a successful and professional communications system in operation at corporate level, through its website and publications. The Evaluation Team considered that there is perhaps an overemphasis on ETF promoting itself as an institution and on disseminating information on ideas and material relating to VET, with less emphasis on results. The main criticism was that key documents were not available in national (or country official) languages so that documentation is often inaccessible (in effect) to the majority of local partners.

26. Tempus: The evaluation found that the efficiency and effectiveness of ETF’s technical assistance to the Tempus programme was considered mostly positive at the Commission Tempus Unit level and in the case study countries. In spite of the uncertainties over the future of Tempus, which characterized the period of the evaluation, the management of Tempus continued to respond to requests for changes in the way it works and it continued to be organised efficiently.

UTILITY (RESULTS AND IMPACT)

27. ETF’s contribution to VET reform: ETF’s contribution to reform is difficult to assess in the countries studied (given that the reform process is dependent on a range of actors in the sector contributing funds and expertise). However the country studies were used to attempt to assess ETF’s longer-term impact.

28. In Croatia, which has proved to be a difficult working environment because of the policy vacuum, while the contribution of ETF has not been in doubt there has been a poor response in terms of uptake by Government. However, in view of Croatia’s new status as a candidate country this might be about to change. In Jordan, based on both views of stakeholders and the Evaluation Team’s own assessment, it is felt that ETF has done a professional job in the analysis and preparation work, but has not been able to support the Jordanian authorities in the definition and implementation of proper reforms.

29. In Tajikistan, through the application of the “policy learning approach”, the theme of VET reform runs through all the EU and ETF project activities. While many projects are relatively new, the results so far reinforce the general consensus that the Republic urgently needs to change its way of governing. Reforms, when they come, will need to be backed up by passive investment to effect any lasting change. At the present time it is too early to judge how successful ETF’s contribution will be in the longer term, but the signs are positive at this stage.

30. In Ukraine, while there is considerable evidence of change and impact at immediate beneficiary level, there is less evidence of systemic change institutionalised into government or regional initiatives and policies. Therefore, while there are examples of dissemination (such as to other VET colleges), the lack of systemic reforms raises concerns about longer-term sustainability.

GOVERNANCE

31. The Governing Board is a statutory body and useful instrument in the governance regime of ETF (from interviews of Commission Service respondents in Brussels). The evaluation reviewed a number of issues including: the role of the Governing Board and the issue of providing strategic direction, membership qualifications, conduct of meetings, new member induction process and information and briefing materials provided ahead of meetings. Analysis from the Web Survey additionally informed the evaluation.

32. Governing Board role and strategic decision making: the primary role of the Governing Board is *inter alia* to approve the proposed annual work programme and budget, subject to final approval by the European Parliament. This they do, but the current system does not allow a proper review of the budget to take place or for amendments to be made.

33. On the issue of members’ roles in strategic decision-making, it is clear that this is not happening. The main strategic direction comes from the Chair and Commission Services Members. It is probably unrealistic for other members to contribute meaningfully to this

strategic vision, except through the raising of queries and on clarification of aspects of EU policy that is presented.

34. Membership qualifications: the issue of qualifications arises because DG EAC, which is the DG *de tutelle* of ETF, has as its main counterparts in Member Countries, Ministries and Departments of Education. As a result, some stakeholders expressed concern that an apparent lack of background in the international or development VET field might lessen the contribution of members. Overall, the make up of the Board members should be from a mix of Ministries of Education, Foreign Affairs and partner countries, with the individuals having an interest and ability to contribute to meetings.

35. Overall the Governing Board meetings were well organised and (taking account of the qualifications and need for improvements above), considerable effort has gone into providing the necessary information and materials. The new member induction programme now offered seems to have overcome earlier criticisms of this process. It is clear that for both new members and for those more experienced, the quality and timeliness of briefing materials is important.

36. On the Advisory Forum, which is constituted to provide advice to the Governing Body on the composition of the Work Programme, while providing a good opportunity for dialogue between representatives of partner countries, it does not fulfil its Work Planning role. The assessment concluded that in its plenary form, the Advisory Forum is a large and unwieldy body, which falls well short of its purpose of providing advice to the Governing Body on the future Work Programme.

SUMMARY OF RECOMMENDATIONS

37. The thematic remit: With the mandate due for revision in 2006 / 2007, it is recommended that it should accommodate the terms Human Resource Development, VET, Life Long Learning and links to the labour market and employment.

38. Geographic remit: There should be a limited change in the geographic remit to enable ETF to provide services to any country, provided a clear case can be made and on the express approval of the Governing Board.

39. Prioritisation between regions and countries: Given ETF's limited resources, ETF should have a clearer focus/prioritisation of resources towards both the Candidate Countries and ENP countries. In all cases, ETF should take account of the favourable climate towards VET support and where there is demonstrable demand when allocating resources.

40. Widening the Client Base: it is recommended that ETF should additionally be able to offer its services more widely among EU agencies and bodies (e.g. EU Parliamentary Committees) as well as member states as is now beginning to happen.

41. Supporting the case for investment in VET: ETF staff should use their position (and influence) as experts in the sector to raise awareness of the importance of VET investment generally and the contribution it can make to the achievement of HRD goals in regional and country development strategies. In terms of furthering ETF's cooperation with other donors, where the Foundation has made a case for investment in VET this should be shared and made available to other donors.

42. Enhancing the role of the Country Plan: The Country Plan, (which has already been recognised by ETF as an essential addition to the planning portfolio) should be further developed as one of the main planks of the planning process. It should be modified to include clear output and outcome objectives (together with appropriate indicators). It should take account of:

- Estimates of human resource / expert time needed for each project / activity.
- The current portfolio of small-scale projects should be aggregated into a smaller number of (larger) projects, with the linkages between different components and synergies clearly apparent.
- Projects (and sub-projects) should be developed using the logframe approach.
- Each project should summarise the monitoring and evaluation arrangements, with a more transparent system of storing and managing files of project descriptions or TOR documents.

43. The Annual Activity Report (AAR) should be modified to include planning information which at present is placed only in the separate Work Programme to provide the link between the planning and results information.
44. Monitoring: It is recommended that ETF attempt to use a self-monitoring system, which is both simple and light in terms of resources needed, with output and outcomes achieved graded by ETF staff with results reported using a standard format.
45. Evaluation: ETF should continue to use independent evaluation studies to assess the role and contribution of ETF's expertise. However, ETF should review this strategy in terms of the costs versus the value.
46. Thematic studies: It is recommended that alternative means of assessing performance should be considered to include undertaking more thematic studies over a range of countries, which would have the potential advantage of informing on-going programmes.
47. User satisfaction survey: Planning, Monitoring and Evaluation (PME) should continue to test and then implement a section on client and user satisfaction as a management indicator for ETF.
48. The PME to provide background policy briefing notes: As Governing Board meetings are used as a forum by the Commission to make policy statements on ETF's future direction and strategic goals, it is recommended that the PME provides Members with background documentation on key external relation instruments to facilitate this process and any discussion which may follow.
49. Questions in writing ahead of each meeting: From the Governing Board members' side, answers, requests and issues should be raised (in writing) in advance of the meeting so that ETF have time to prepare the necessary material and have the relevant information available.
50. A finance sub-committee: It is recommended that the Governing Board convene a finance sub-committee who would receive a draft of the Plan and Budget during the planning/budgeting process, with the opportunity to comment on the drafts.
51. Further sub-committees should be considered in the future, such as for Performance Effectiveness (i.e. to increase the demand for quality evidence on ETF's performance and impact).
52. ETF's role in supporting the Governing Board process: To improve further the support role provided, ETF should:
- Make clear to Commission Services that the present arrangements require a large number people in ETF to be involved in the Governing Board support process. In order to reduce the impact on ETF staff time, the possibility of a funding a specific post of Desk Officer at ETF to support the Governing Board, acting in effect as a secretariat to the Board should be considered
 - Provide a short 3 – 5 line description on each relevant topic ahead of meetings in order to facilitate the understanding of the documentation provided
53. Preferred experience and background of Governing Board members: To assist Member States in the process of identifying participants best suited to the role of Governing Board Member, Commission Services, (through DGEAC) should draw up a guidance note summarising the role and duties of Board Members, which also characterised the preferred background and experience of prospective members. This action would also require an appropriate change to the Legal Mandate.
54. A role in dissemination of information on ETF: It is recommended that members of the Governing Board disseminate information on ETF's activities in order to increase the visibility of the Foundation.
55. Advisory Forum: It is recommended that the Advisory Forum is de-linked from its statutory function, and that it should hold regional meetings to inform the work planning process. The plenary meetings session should no longer be held. ETF should also review the arrangements for the regional meetings to assess whether less costly means alternatives are possible.
56. Communications: ETF should make available shorter versions of key documents (to reduce translation costs) with the aim of increasing the number of documents translated into Arabic, Russian and Turkish and make these available on the ETF web site.

ETF ACTION PLAN IN RESPONSE TO THE THIRD EXTERNAL EVALUATION OF ETF 2005

“The Commission invites the ETF to submit a draft Action Plan to the Governing Board, outlining its analysis and proposed action on all recommendations made by the evaluator and by the Commission in this report.”
(COM Communication N°832 of 19/12/2006)

External evaluators recommend:	Commission recommends in the COM Communication:	ETF comments:	Proposed actions	Time frame:
KEY AREA 1 : POLICY AND STRATEGY				
1.1 Interpreting the thematic scope of the mandate: mandate to be amended to reflect the new realities of a broader interpretation of VET/LLL.	Commission proposes to address the issue in the upcoming revision of ETF's regulation by broadening its mandate to <i>'contribute, in the context of EU external relations policies, to the improvement of human resources development, in particular education and training in a lifelong learning perspective, and related labour-market issues'</i> . The Commission proposes five functions in the revised Council Regulation proposal.	ETF appreciates and supports the proposal in the External Evaluation and the Commission Communication to align its thematic mandate with the EU internal and external policy while maintaining ETF's focus on the vocational education and training sector. ETF consider that this change responds to the policy and system reform needs in the partner countries. ETF also appreciates the five functions proposed by the Commission in the Communication. These reflect the main features of ETF's interventions in the partner countries.	1.1.1 ETF has revised its Mission Statement, and prepared its MTP and WP 2007 on the basis of the new thematic mandate. 1.1.2. A key feature in the MTP is ETF's expertise development programme, designed to bring ETF approaches into line with the new mandate. 1.1.3. ETF has prepared its MTP and annual work programme around the five functions. The functions will provide a framework for ETF's country and project implementation plans.	2007-2010
1.2 ETF should have a clearer focus/prioritisation towards both the CC and ENP countries: 1 st level priority Candidate Countries, 2 nd level priority potential Candidate Countries, 3 rd level priority ENP countries. Within ENP countries, ETF should take account of the relative priority accorded by the EC on a country-by-country basis. For countries outside the ENP and CCs (and potential CCs), where (a) ETF can demonstrate a high added value as a catalyst and innovator, and (b) where the key constraint is identified as being a critical lack of capacity to undertake a VET/LLL reform process, then a case can be made for ETF involvement. The countries in the Central Asia region should be ranked in	ETF, which has limited resources, should maintain a certain geographical focus, coupled with a degree of flexibility. It is therefore proposed that the ETF's primary scope be defined by reference to the IPA and to the ENPI. In order to provide a degree of flexibility, and to use ETF's expertise in areas falling outside its primary geographical scope, such as the Central Asian countries, it is proposed that the ETF may operate in other countries designated as partner countries by decision of its Governing Board on proposal from the Commission.	ETF appreciates the need to focus its resources on key priorities in agreement with the Commission and Governing Board. In co-operation with the Commission, ETF has developed a tool to assess reform potential in its partner countries according to the level of EC priority and the reform context in the partner country. ETF looks forward to requests from the Commission and Governing Board to provide support to additional partner countries.	1.2.1. ETF has prepared an indicative split of resources according to priorities between the IPA, ENPI and DCECI regions in the MTP 2007-2010 for approval by GB. 1.2.2. ETF has designed a tool to assess reform potential in partner countries. This tool has been used to inform the prioritisation of partner countries in the annual work programme. The tool will be revised annually. 1.2.3. In order to maintain a certain	End 2006

<p>order of priority and resources used by ETF should be proportionate. For all countries, ETF should take account where a) there is a favourable policy and political climate to VET reform, b) there is demonstrable in-country demand for key stakeholders.</p>			<p>flexibility in its capacity to respond to evolving EU external relations priorities, ETF has maintained a financing facility for providing support to the Commission</p>	
<p>1.3 Extend the client base: ETF should additionally be able to offer its services more widely among EU agencies and bodies (e.g. EU Parliamentary Committees) as well as member states. The method of financing this support is to be agreed with the EC.</p>	<p>ETF should keep the Commission fully informed on its operations, initiatives and contacts with other donors in order to ensure a European coherent approach in the external relations.</p>	<p>ETF appreciates the remarks in the ITAD external evaluation report regarding the establishment of advantages of structured links with EU bodies and donors. In particular, ETF is convinced of the importance of continued co-operation with EU bodies such as the Parliament, Council and other EU agencies. The main objective is to ensure that the expertise built up by the Community in ETF can be drawn on by EU bodies to develop common EU approaches. The type of co-operation will be tailored to the specificity of the different institutions, however, it is expected to consist of consultation on priorities, information exchange and dissemination of outputs and joint activities. This type of co-operation should be funded through the main annual subvention from the EU budget. Specific requests from Member States or donors for joint activities will need approval from ETF Governing Board on a case-by-case basis in line with Governing Board regulations.</p> <p>ETF will still be open to joint activities with EU Member States and donors, according to the guidelines agreed with the Governing Board in 2004.</p> <p>ETF also appreciates the importance of keeping the Commission fully informed of its activities with other donors in order to ensure coherence in EU external relations.</p>	<p>1.3.1. ETF will continue to provide information and disseminate the outputs of its work to the European Parliament and Council as requested by the relevant committees. 1.3.2. ETF will continue to organise exchanges of information and joint activities with the agencies in Bilbao, Dublin and Cedefop on its thematic work to ensure coherence of EU approaches to lifelong learning. This will be the subject of a specific annex in the 2007 annual work programme. 1.3.3. ETF will continue to assess and develop opportunities for administrative co-operation and economies of scale between EU agencies, with particular reference to EFSA in Parma. As above, this element will be the subject of a specific annex in the work programme and be the subject of reports to the Board 1.3.4. ETF will continue to explore opportunities for co-operation with EU Member States and Donors. The main objective will be to ensure that Member States and Donors can access the information and knowledge built up in ETF as a contribution to aid harmonisation and alignment. The Commission will be kept informed through the Structured Dialogue process, and the Board will be kept updated in Board meetings.</p>	<p>Ongoing</p> <p>Ongoing</p> <p>November 2006</p> <p>Ongoing</p> <p>Ongoing</p>

KEY AREA 2: EFFICIENCY AND EFFECTIVENESS OF ETF PROGRAMMES				
<p>2.1 Support the case for investment in VET, especially through the EC:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> ETF staff to use their position (and influence as experts in the sector) to raise awareness of the importance of VET investment generally and the contribution it can make to the achievement of HRD goals in regional and country development strategies. It is legitimate for ETF experts to ensure that VET is being considered for inclusion in country programmes. It is important that ETF makes high-quality evidence available to justify such policy decisions. To assist in achieving longer term impact on VET/LLL, ETF should through its existing and planned programmes continue to raise awareness of the importance of VET investment opportunities, play a part in VET programme cooperation and with other donors identify means of supporting systemic changes and scaling-up to help ensure sustainability of VET initiatives. 	<p>ETF should keep the Commission fully informed on its operations, initiatives and contacts with other donors in order to ensure a European coherent approach in the external relations. This demands a renewed commitment from both sides to strong communication and exchange.</p>	<p>ETF appreciates the suggestions made by the ITAD evaluators and the response the Commission on steps to enhance the effectiveness of its activities. During 2005-2006, ETF has contributed to the programming of EU aid in IPA, ENPI and DCECI (Central Asia) regions by providing structured analysis of the HRD sector and outlining key challenges and priorities for system reform. During 2006, ETF has also started contributing to the annual report on reform progress that the Commission provides in each region. The reports are intended not only as a tool for the Commission, but are also available for the partner countries and donors as a means of prioritising aid in the sector. ETF will continue to invest in diagnostic tools and policy learning approaches to provide a common dynamic analytical structure that can be used as a reform agenda for the countries, and donors.</p>	<p>2.1.1. ETF will continue to provide annual reports on progress of reform in partner countries 2.1.2. ETF will develop its portfolio of diagnostic tools the policy learning approaches to provide in-depth assessment of policy and system reform needs in partner countries. This reinforced approach will be developed in priority countries 2007-2008 with active participation of partner countries and in close co-operation with the donor community. 2.1.3. ETF will disseminate its country analyses and diagnostic tools for use by the partner countries and donors, in particular through the OECD-DAC network.</p>	<p>Ongoing 2007-2009 2007-2009</p>
<p>2.2 Enhancing the role of Country Plan: Country Plan to be further developed as one of the main planks of the planning process. The format for the individual country plan to include clear output and outcome objectives. The specific recommendations for country plan:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> Each project/activity title should include a basic description setting out key objectives, and detailed tasks set in a clearly specified time frame Estimates of HR/expert time needed for each project/activity should be attempted in order to compare the relative size or importance of the individual projects Current portfolio of small-scale projects to be aggregated into a smaller number of larger projects, with linkages and synergies clearly apparent. Projects (and sub -projects) should be developed using the logframe approach and presented in a 	<p>ETF has to look at its planning cycle, in particular the agency is asked to analyse how the links between, the MTP, the annual WP, the country plans and the annual activity report can be reinforced and be made more explicit. Relevant measurable indicators should be defined in order to facilitate the follow-up of the set objectives and goals</p>	<p>ETF appreciates the attention given by the External Evaluation and Commission Communication to improvements in its planning cycle. During 2006, ETF has carried out a full review of its planning cycle to introduce improvements for the period 2007-2013.</p> <p>New Strategic Planning Guidelines adopted in ETF introduce a stronger link between Mid term perspective, work programme, Country Plans and Annual Activity Report. Comparison between the planned and executed situation was introduced in Annual Activity Report 2005.</p> <p>ETF agrees report with the recommendation from ITAD that it should further focus its efforts on fewer more substantial projects.</p>	<p>2.2.1. ETF to introduce a matrix linking the objectives in the Mid term perspective 2007-2010 with expected results and indicators in the annual work programme. The matrix will be the subject of regular reporting to the Governing Board and in the annual activity reports. 2.2.2. ETF Country Plan structure is under revision in line with ITAD recommendations. The revised structure to be adopted by ETF in October 2006 in time to draw up the Country Plans 2007-2010. The plans will include section for annual assessment (of about one page) of the achievement of the results each year over the period 2007-2010</p>	<p>November 2006 October 2006</p>

<p>logframe matrix, with key indicators given for the results and outcomes.</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • End-of-project reports and review meetings to be considered, as this would provide a mechanism for learning and self-evaluation. • A section summarising the monitoring and evaluation proposals for the year (and resource requirements if any) outlining how the country performance will be monitored should be included . • A more transparent system of storing and managing files of detailed project descriptions or TOR than available at present in Country Manager's file systems. • The Annual Activity Report (AAR) to be modified to include planning information which at present is placed only in the separate WP. This would enable the "correlation" of planning and results information between this document and the Work Programme. 		<p>A more rigorous planning and project design approach on Logframe principles was introduced in 2006. All ETF 2006 projects are designed on a common format. Project proposals include a project implementation plan with key milestones, expected outcomes, financial inputs and human resource allocation. Projects are designed and quality checked now within project teams covering the expertise needed for the projects, both in terms of project management and content expertise.</p> <p>The information/document management in ETF has been improved and streamlined in 2006. Projects documents are organised under the categories of initiation, planning, execution, monitoring, closing, finance & procurement and reporting. Further improvements to ETF knowledge management planned 2007-2010</p>	<p>against the objectives defined in the same document (See also point 3.1). 2.2.3. The needs of project document management in ETF to be thoroughly taken into account in adopting a new information management system in 2007. In addition to a yearly country plan assessment, a standard model for final reporting of completed projects to be introduced. ETF has proposed a major project in knowledge management under the Innovation and Learning activity in 2007 to further develop its knowledge and document management capacities. The outcomes of this project will be shared with the Board.</p> <p>2.2.4. ETF Work programme 2007 demonstrates an increased focus of ETF's activities. The number of projects in the yearly Work Programmes has been reduced in the yearly Work Programmes from 35 to 20.</p>	<p>2007</p> <p>November 2007</p>
KEY AREA 3: MONITORING OF ETF PROGRAMMES				
<p>3.1 Self-monitoring system</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Indicators to be graded in terms of achievement using the "4" high; "3" substantial; "2" modest; and "1" low system of scoring. Scoring/grading at 6 monthly intervals, with the results being utilised and reported on in the Annual Activity reporting cycle. • Within this cycle, standard reporting formats should be used to report on achievement of results for each country with the information for management purpose at country and organisational level. • Monitoring should continue to test and then implement a section on client and user satisfaction as a management indicator for ETF. • The Monitoring Team should apportion their use of 	<p>ETF needs to reinforce its monitoring system on country level. Available country programme information needs to be collected in a systematic way in order to inform adequately strategic and management decisions at the organisational level. ETF should develop a relevant monitoring system to address identified shortcomings. As the evaluator states, <i>"the challenge is to develop an approach that provides meaningful information at this level, and in a way that is not cumbersome and mechanistic."</i></p>	<p>ETF welcomes the attention given by the External Evaluation and Commission Communication to improvements in its monitoring.</p> <p>However, scoring exercise fits better to the Commission context where resources are available for external monitoring teams and monitoring field visits (Aidco World-Wide Monitoring). Scoring by ETF project teams of their projects themselves would not provide relevant information for the Annual Report. Scoring adapts better to the feedback questionnaires on ETF events and ETF</p>	<p>3.1.1. ETF event and service feedback questionnaire to be revised (introducing scoring instead of qualitative criteria).</p> <p>3.1.2. The Mid-Term and Annual Country Plan to include a section for annual assessment of the achievement of the results each year over the period 2007-2010. These plans will be made public end 2006 (See also point 2.2)</p> <p>3.1.3. ETF feedback survey (twice a year) to be continued.</p> <p>3.1.4. Evaluation programme for</p>	<p>End 2006</p> <p>End 2006</p> <p>Ongoing</p>

resources in line with the prioritisation between regions and countries as given above.		services (as a response to Commission requests) already in place. External evaluations commissioned by ETF have covered by now Bulgaria, Syria, Macedonia and Turkey, i.e. priority countries.	2007-2010 to prioritise Candidate Countries and ENP Countries.	
3.2 Evaluation: ETF should continue to use independent evaluation studies to assess the role and contribution of ETF's expertise on policy reform, capacity building and other indicators of change in the VET / LLL sector. The strategy should be reviewed in terms of the costs versus the value, given that only a small number of countries can be evaluated each year. Alternative means of assessing performance might include undertaking more thematic studies over a range of countries, which would have the potential advantage of informing on-going programmes, rather than relying on a small number of country evaluations, with perhaps less opportunity for lesson learning.	No comment in the COM.	The 2002 external evaluation emphasised the importance of country evaluations. The 2005 external evaluation recommends thematic regional evaluations but country based monitoring.	3.2.1. A thematic evaluation to be undertaken in 2007 as a test-bed. 3.2.2. Evaluation programme for 2007-2010 to prioritise Candidate Countries and ENP Countries.	Ongoing
KEY AREA 4: GOVERNANCE STRUCTURES				
4.1 Governing Board providing strategic direction: <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • <u>PMEU to provide background policy briefing notes:</u> As GB meetings are used as a forum by the Commission to make policy statements on ETF's future direction and strategic goals, it is recommended that the PMEU provides GB members with background documentation on key external relation instruments to facilitate this process and any discussion which may follow. • <u>Questions in writing ahead of each meeting:</u> From the GB members' side answers, requests and issues should be raised in advance of the meetings so that ETF has time to prepare the necessary material and have the relevant information available. 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • ETF's objectives are defined in its legal basis and its activities and priorities are to large extent determined by the external policies and instruments of the EU. Therefore it is questionable how strong the strategic role of the Governing Board could be and/or should be. • The Commission has submitted to the European Parliament and to the Council a draft Inter-institutional agreement on the operating framework for the European regulatory agencies. That agreement proposes that the size of the administrative boards of Agencies be limited in such a way as to promote highly effective decision-making and minimise operating costs, and that there should be parity in the number of votes between the members designated by the Council and those designated by the 	ETF appreciates recommendations made in the ITAD report to increase the efficiency and effectiveness of the Governing Board. ETF agrees that providing Board Members with relevant background reference documents (in particular, Community legislative or policy documents) can help Board Members in their deliberations. ETF looks forward to the outcomes of the consultation with the Parliament and Council regarding possible changes to the governance structure.	4.1.1. ETF will set up a dedicated space in the GB restricted area in ETF website to provide background documentation on key external relation instruments. 4.1.2. A mechanism to collect GB questions in time before each meeting is already in place.	2007 Ongoing

	Commission. The Commission in its proposal for a revised regulation of the ETF will follow the principles indicated in the above mentioned draft interinstitutional agreement.			
4.2 Finance sub-committee: GB to convene a finance sub-committee who would receive the draft WP and Budget during the planning process, with the opportunity to comment on the drafts. A final draft to be made available ahead of the GB meeting itself so that any modification could be made before the plenary. The committee would then be in a position to report back to the GB at the plenary with their recommendations, subject to a full discussion with MS representatives.	The recommendation to establish sub-committees on specific important files needs further analysis.	ETF agrees that, given that the Board adopts the Agency's work programme, budget, annual activity report and accounts, Members should be given proper control mechanisms to help them discharge their responsibilities. ETF noted that the IAS Audit Report dated December 2005 recommended that Audit Committee be set up within the ETF. In 2003, a similar proposal was made to the Board, but was turned down by the Board due to time constraints.	4.2.1. ETF, in consultation with the Chair, will put forward a discussion document to the Board regarding the establishment of sub-committees to facilitate the work of the Board. It is proposed to submit the paper once the new Council Regulation is adopted.	Mid 2007
4.3 ETF role in supporting GB process and providing information: ETF should: <ul style="list-style-type: none"> Seek funding for a post for a Desk Officer to support the GB, acting as a secretariat of the GB Provide a short 3-5 line description on each relevant topic ahead of meetings in order to facilitate the understanding of the documentation provided. 	The Commission is not convinced by the proposal to seek funding for a post for a Desk officer at the ETF to support the Governing Board.	ETF appreciates the importance of providing adequate support to Board Members. ETF agrees with the Commission position, that it has sufficient resources available to support Board Members.	4.3.1. Short 3-5 line descriptions have already been introduced.	
4.4 Experience and background of GB members: DG EAC should draw up a guidance note summarising the role and duties of GB members, which also characterises the preferred background and experience of prospective members. This action would also require an appropriate change to the Legal Mandate. A mix of representation in VET / HRD with specific experience in the international development / overseas aid arena is recommended.	No comment in the COM.	ETF would support efforts by the Commission and Member States to enhance the capacity, authority and representative nature of the Governing Board in line with the Board's responsibilities and the mission of the ETF.		
4.5 GB members' role of dissemination of information on ETF: Members should disseminate information on ETF activities in order to increase its visibility. By acting as an information disseminator, this would enhance the GB role and efficiency in terms of assisting the process of "joint-bilateral" cooperation (i.e. through ETF being involved in the preparation of a project in the development agency of a Member State).	No comment in the COM.	ETF awareness raising events in Member States have started to take place in 2006. First seminar was held in Sweden in January and the second will take place in Cyprus in autumn. ETF has also taken steps to enable Board Members to shadow operational activities as a means of increasing their first-hand awareness of ETF's work. Ten GB Members participated in ETF activities	4.5.1. ETF intends to continue its programme of awareness raising in Member States throughout the next Mid term Perspective. A regular report will be provided to the Board	Ongoing

<p>4.6 De-link Advisory Forum from its statutory Function: AF to hold regional meetings to inform the work planning process. The plenary session should be dropped as this is costly and ineffective way of advising GB on the WP. ETF should also review the arrangements for the regional meetings to assess whether less costly means of engaging the partner countries is possible.</p>	<p>It is proposed not to include Advisory Forum as a statutory body in the revision of ETFs regulation. The Commission asks also the ETF to analyse the recommendations of the evaluator for a different way of operating of the Forum.</p>	<p>ETF agrees that, although the AF has played an important role in providing ETF with informed input from stakeholders in the partner countries and from expert institutions, it has not been effective in advising the Board on the Work Programme. ETF does however need to continue, or indeed reinforce, its networking with key stakeholders from the partner countries and expert institutions</p>	<p>4.6.1. A review of the Advisory Forum network will be presented to the Governing Board for approval November 2006</p>	<p>End-2006</p>
<p>KEY AREA 5: COMMUNICATION AND INFORMATION DISSEMINATION</p>				
<p>5.1 Communications:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> Enhance providing support documentation in the Partner Countries. ETF should make available shorter versions of key documents (to reduce translation costs) with the aim of increasing the number of documents translated into Arabic, Russian and Turkish and make these available on the ETF internet site. 	<p>ETF to analyse the recommendations made by the external evaluator.</p>	<p>The ETF has designed a comprehensive set of communication tools tailored to the needs of different target groups. It will be important during the term 2007 to 2010 to continuously review these tools, improve the coordination and quality of expertise communication and target information to deliver cost-effectively the right products and services at the right time to relevant target groups.</p> <p>The principle aims of ETF communication activities are to support policy development and knowledge-sharing, enhance the impact of the EU external assistance programmes and develop communication with citizens in line with the European Commission's Plan D by mainstreaming information and encouraging dialogue and debate.</p> <p>The ETF's main emphasis will be on promoting its achievements and activities through information and exchanges of expertise, knowledge-sharing and experience through publications, the Internet, the media, meetings and other appropriate means, taking particular account of cost-effectiveness, new technologies and the linguistic diversity of its main audiences.</p>	<p>5.1.1. Increase communication material available in Russian, Arabic and other partner country languages.</p> <p>5.1.2. Increase communication material on the ETF's achievements and results.</p> <p>5.1.3. Increase the dissemination of ideas and material relating to the ETF's thematic areas.</p>	<p>2007</p> <p>2007</p> <p>2007</p>

		<p>The ETF's communication activities are central to taking forward the organisation's function to disseminate information and encourage exchanges of experience. They are an important means of sharing expertise, facilitating policy learning and developing in-house knowledge and capabilities.</p>		
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