

Workshops on VET Teachers and Trainers: Key Actors to Make Lifelong Learning a Reality in Europe

Study-specific background paper 4

“Network of Trainers in Europe: Preliminary results of survey with practitioners”

Background

The Network of Trainers in Europe is a three year project that supports research and practice in training throughout Europe. Its objective is to provide access to people and ideas about research and training practice, practical materials and tools to support the professional development of trainers, and a website with information and a communication platform for exchanging ideas. The network involves ten international core partners and is funded under the *Leonardo da Vinci* strand of the Lifelong Learning Programme.

The work programme of the network (with duration from 2007-2010) is characterised by a number of joint network activities one of which consists of implanting a questionnaire among training practitioners in about 20 European countries. This international, small-scale survey was implemented between April and October 2008. The questionnaire was made available in 18 European languages and distributed both online and in paper versions. By 25 August 2008, 592 respondents had filled the questionnaire. A first preliminary analysis was carried out in order to identify basic characteristics and issues that might deserve further consideration and investigation. In what follows some results of this explorative analysis are presented.

Structure of the sample

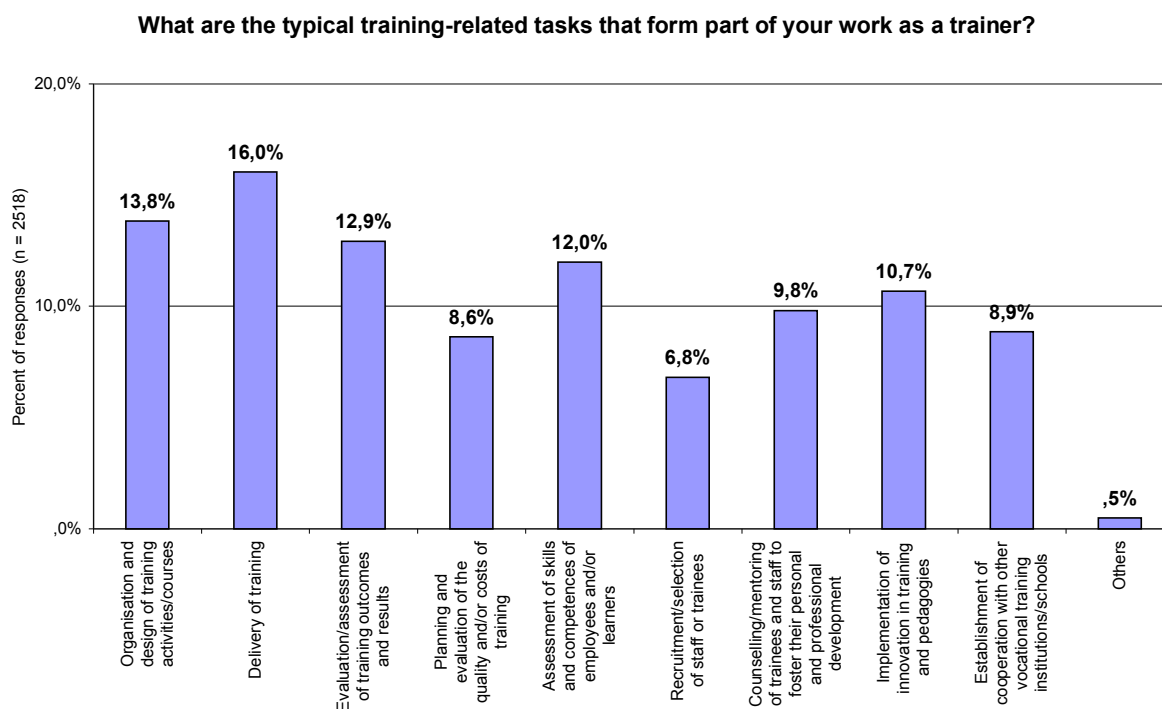
By 25 August 2008 there were 592 respondents from 28 European countries in the sample. As regards the distribution of respondents by country, the largest proportion came from Greece (66), followed by Austria (55) and Italy (45). Given that the number of respondents was very low in some of the countries, the analysis was limited to the European level. For the most part the analysis consists of the calculation of frequencies and descriptive statistics. It must be observed that for most of the questions multiple answers were possible, which means that the percentages of cases usually add up to more than 100%. For sake of clarity the presentation of results will concentrate on the percentages of responses instead of the percentages of cases, except for those questions where no multiple answers were possible.

As regards the employment status or affiliation of the respondents, most of them worked in a public institution such as vocational schools or colleges. The share of these is 45.2%. Another 30.5% are employees in a private company, 14.9% work for private training providers and 8.6% are self-employed. The affiliation varies strikingly between the different countries. Whereas in Austria or Cyprus the largest part of respondents are trainers in private companies, the Greek and Spanish respondents come predominantly from public institutions. Italy is the only country in the survey where the largest number of participants works for private training providers (64.4%). Therefore it can be assumed that the sample consists not only of trainers in the narrow sense of in-company trainers, but a broad range of training practitioners including VET teachers.

Most of the respondents work in the fields of initial vocational training (59.4%), continuing vocational training (50.5%) and adult education (53.3%). The figures for those occupied with the training of trainers (31.8%) and counselling and guidance (34.8%) are considerably lower, and 18.9% of the respondents are involved in other training-related domains. On average, respondents dedicate 57% of their working time to training and training related activities.

Occupational profile and work conditions

The first topic addressed in the survey was the tasks and working conditions of the respondents. Similar to the Eurotrainer study on which the network is based, the survey aimed to describe the job profiles of training practitioners in terms of the tasks they actually perform. When trainers were asked about the most typical training related tasks they perform as part of their work, they were offered ten answer categories. The result was that the delivery of training (16.0%) and the organisation and design of training activities (13.8%), together with the evaluation of training results and the assessment of trainees and employees were the ones most frequently mentioned. These four categories together account for almost 55% of all responses, indicating a relatively traditional work profile of the training practitioners in the survey.



Managerial tasks like the recruitment and selection of staff or trainees, quality management or the establishment of cooperation with other institutions, on the other hand, are less relevant. The same picture of a relatively traditional job profile is conveyed by the results concerning the training methods used. The methods most frequently used are classroom-based teaching (17.7% of responses), work-based learning (16.0%), demonstration and imitation (13.4%) and textbooks and working sheets (12.8%).

The respondents were also asked a number of questions relating to their work environment and the conditions of their work. The first of these was the question with whom the respondents cooperated mostly in their work. As in the previous Eurotrainer study, respondents showed a strong orientation towards their own institutions. Trainers mostly cooperate with colleagues in their own institutions (37.9% of responses), but also with teachers in general or vocational schools (21.2%) and people from external institutions (23.8%).

The vast majority of the respondents declared that their training and their performance as trainers is subject to evaluation. The proportion of those whose work is evaluated on a regular basis is 50.9%, and another 32.3% declare that their work is evaluated, but not regularly. The evaluation is most frequently carried out by the employers (64.8% of cases, 38.2% of responses) as well as by the learners (66.6% of cases, 39.2% of responses).

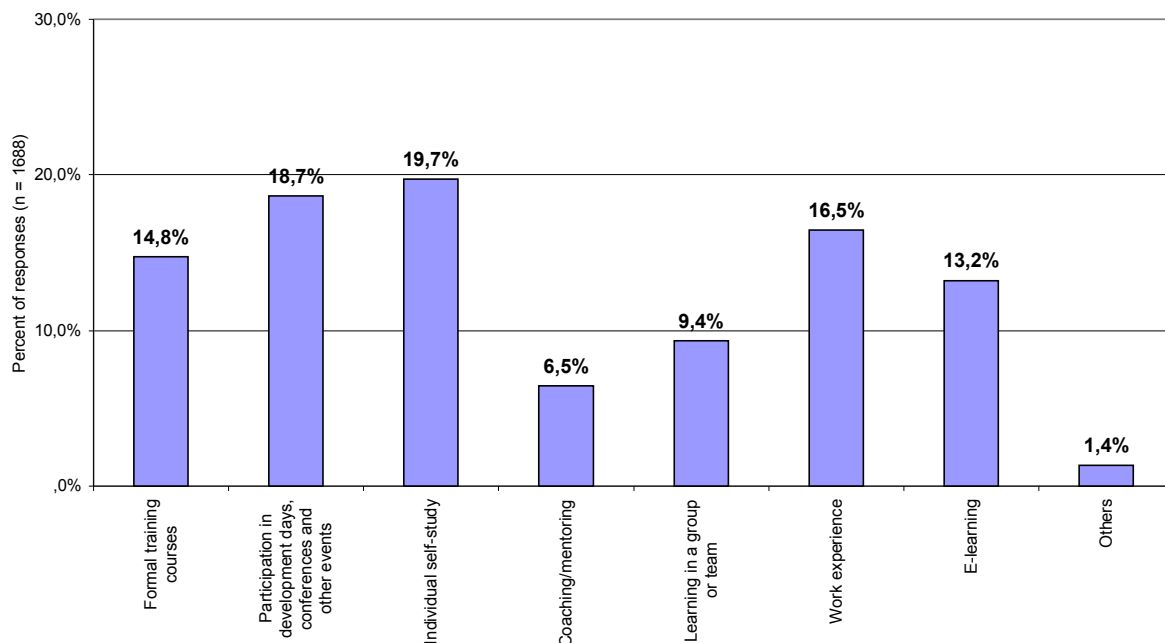
Qualifications and continuing learning

The qualifications and the continuing professional development of training practitioners were also a topic of the survey. Respondents were first asked whether they have a formal qualification or certificate as trainers, and whether they have completed an initial vocational training programme to acquire skilled worker status. The majority of respondents (73.9%) have a formal qualification as a trainer, which is a higher score than in the first Eurotrainer survey. However, it should be observed that the present survey, unlike the Eurotrainer study, is not confined to in-company trainers, but includes also trainers or teachers from public institutions. The proportion of those with an IVET qualification at the level of skilled workers is equally high (72.6%).

Altogether the respondents feel that their skills and competences are in line with their training tasks. It is 65.6% who answer that their skills and competences, in their view, are “well matched” to their tasks. This result is little surprising given the fact that the training practitioners in the sample also have a remarkably positive attitude towards continuing professional development so that they constantly adapt their professional skills to the requirements of their jobs. This is documented by the fact that 87.7% of the respondents regularly update their knowledge and skills related to their work as a trainer. The largest group of respondents (37.5%) spend on average more than 8 hours per month on continuing learning.

Trainers mostly rely on individual self-study as a source of learning (19.7% of responses), but the participation in conferences and other events (18.7%) and work experience (16.5%) are also quite important, whereas formal training courses are only on the fourth rank (14.8%). It is remarkable that the majority of respondents tend to engage in relatively non-formal, self-organised forms of learning that require a certain amount of self-initiative.

What sources of learning do you use for your own professional development?

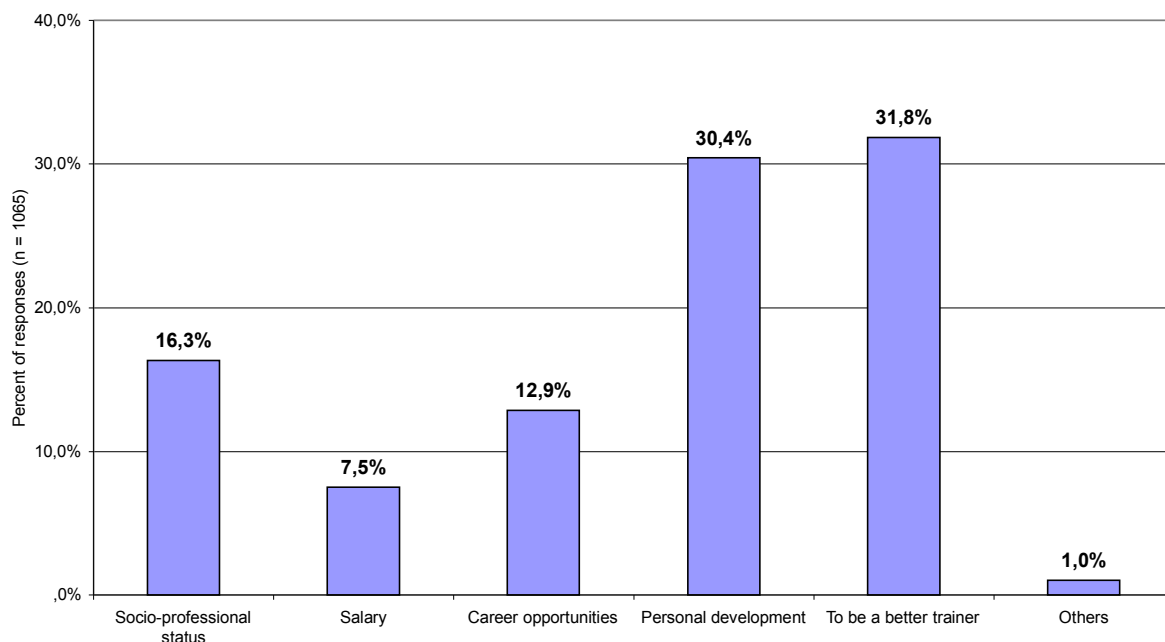


The continuing learning activities that respondents engage in concentrate mainly on technical or subject-specific competences (20.1% of responses) as well as pedagogical competences (17.0%). However, more management related competences such as communication, interaction and leadership (17.3%) or management, planning and organisation of training (14.1%) are also quite important.

Motivation and professional identity

The survey finally investigated the attitudes of training practitioners towards professional development and to their profession in general. Respondents were asked why they engaged in continuing learning or not and what they saw as the benefits of engaging in continuing learning. Those who do not update their skills and competences are mainly prevented from doing so by the lack of incentives in terms of remuneration, status and career (23.0% of responses) and the absence of adequate training opportunities (21.9%). This means that those who rely on formal training opportunities rather than self-organised types of learning and who are motivated predominantly by economic benefits are altogether less active in continuing professional development. Conversely, those training practitioners who engage in continuing learning mostly name intrinsic values such as the improvement as a trainer (31.8% of responses) or personal development (30.4%) as the major benefits, whereas career opportunities (12.9%) or salary (7.5%) do not play an important part. They also indicate that their participation in continuing learning is mainly self-initiated (58.0% of responses) instead of employer-directed or due to statutory requirements. This suggests that the professional development of training practitioners is predominantly driven by personal interest and intrinsic motivation rather than economic incentives.

What do you see as the benefits of engaging in continuing learning?



On the whole the training practitioners in the sample have a quite positive attitude towards their profession. The vast majority of respondents think that working as a trainer is “very attractive” (38.7%) or “attractive” (46.4%). This corresponds to the fact that the decision to become a trainer was in the first place motivated by personal interest (32.7% of responses) and not so much by incentives such as higher professional status or better pay (11.3%). The further steps in the analysis of the survey will have to investigate how these motivational dispositions vary between countries and different types of training practitioners.

What were the main reasons why you decided to become a trainer?

