



Education and Culture DG

Lifelong Learning Programme



COMENIUS SCHOOL PARTNERSHIPS

Handbook for schools

COMENIUS SCHOOL PARTNERSHIPS HANDBOOK FOR SCHOOLS



EUROPEAN COMMISSION
Education and Culture

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INTRODUCTION	5
GLOSSARY	7
1. WHAT IS COMENIUS?	11
1.1. WHY SHOULD WE GET INVOLVED IN COMENIUS SCHOOL PARTNERSHIPS?	11
1.2. COMENIUS SCHOOL PARTNERSHIPS: WHAT ARE THEY?	12
1.3. CONTENT AND ORIENTATION.....	13
1.3.1. Multilateral School Partnerships	13
1.3.2. Bilateral School Partnerships.....	17
1.4. MOBILITY WITHIN PROJECTS	19
2. HOW TO SET UP A COMENIUS SCHOOL PARTNERSHIP?	21
2.1. THE INITIAL DECISION	21
2.2. HOW TO FIND PARTNERS	22
2.3. PREPARATORY VISITS.....	22
2.3.1. What are they?	22
2.3.2. What to take into account when first meeting with your partners	23
2.4. PREPARING THE APPLICATION FOR FUNDING	24
2.4.1. How to go about it?	24
2.4.2. What makes a good application?	25
2.5. SELECTION AND ENTERING INTO THE CONTRACT	26
2.5.1. The selection process	26
2.5.2. What happens if your application is successful?	26
2.5.3. Grant support and grant rules	27
2.5.4. Reporting.....	27
3. THE COMENIUS SCHOOL PARTNERSHIP GETS UNDER WAY.....	29
3.1. ORGANISING THE PARTNERSHIP	29
3.2. HOW TO SET UP A WORK PLAN	29
3.3. TEAM BUILDING AT YOUR SCHOOL – WHOLE SCHOOL PROJECTS.....	29
3.4. INVOLVEMENT OF LOCAL COMMUNITY AND OTHER POTENTIAL PLAYERS	30
3.5. COMMUNICATING WITH YOUR PARTNERS	31
3.5.1. Which language/s to use?	31
3.5.2. Which means of communication to use?.....	31
3.6. INFORMATION AND COMMUNICATION TECHNOLOGY IN A PROJECT	32
3.7. MONITORING PROGRESS – SELF-EVALUATION	32
3.8. RESULTS AND THEIR DISSEMINATION	33
3.9. PUPIL EXCHANGES IN BILATERAL SCHOOL PARTNERSHIPS	34
3.10. SAFE AND SMOOTH MOBILITY.....	36
3.11. SUSTAINABILITY.....	36
3.12. HOSTING A COMENIUS ASSISTANT	37
4. POSSIBLE PROBLEMS AND HOW TO AVOID THEM	39
5. CONCLUSION.....	41
ANNEX	43



COMENIUS SCHOOL PARTNERSHIPS

HANDBOOK FOR SCHOOLS

This Handbook is an update of the original version published in 2001. It includes all relevant information on funding conditions for Comenius School Partnerships within the new Lifelong Learning Programme (2007–2013). It has been produced jointly by the European Commission and some National Agencies. Other guidelines and the results of numerous projects and studies have been invaluable in developing and updating this Handbook. A list of reference material can be found in the annex.



INTRODUCTION

Why a handbook on Comenius School Partnerships?

This handbook has two main goals: firstly, to give you and your school the information you need to decide whether or not you would like to take part in a Comenius School Partnership; secondly, it aims to give you advice on how to apply for funding in order to carry out a successful Comenius School Partnership. There are many advantages to participating in a Comenius School Partnership. However, it is an undertaking which demands a lot of energy and time and requires careful reflection. This handbook has been designed to help you avoid any possible frustrations and problems, and to help make European cooperation work. The information and advice in this handbook are meant to make it easier for your school to take part in a Comenius School Partnership, and to enjoy the benefits of enhanced cooperation and expanded horizons for pupils and staff alike.

Chapter 1 of the handbook briefly presents the principles and the philosophy upon which the Comenius School Partnerships are based. It also mentions some of the many advantages of taking part, and provides a description of the possible partnership activities, as well as of the opportunities they offer for transnational mobility. Chapter 2 guides you through the different phases of setting up a Comenius School Partnership, and Chapter 3 gives you advice on how to carry it out. The last chapter, Chapter 4, mentions possible problems and how they are best avoided. You will also find an Annex, which provides a list of references and links.





GLOSSARY

Some of the jargon in this handbook or in European cooperation in general may not be familiar to you. To help overcome any difficulty, we provide here some of the specific vocabulary used in Comenius and the Lifelong Learning Programme, which you will need to have at your command while using this handbook.

CALL FOR PROPOSALS: The Call for Proposals is a legal text inviting interested parties to submit proposals for projects or partnerships. The text defines the specifications for preparing and submitting a proposal: thematic priorities, types of funding, technicalities of submission, deadlines etc. Calls are published in the Official Journal of the EU in all Community languages. The call text for the Lifelong Learning Programme is also published on the website of the European Commission:

<http://ec.europa.eu/llp>

CONTENT AND LANGUAGE INTEGRATED LEARNING (CLIL): CLIL refers to any dual-focused educational context in which an additional language, i.e. usually not the first language (mother tongue) of the pupils involved, is used as a medium in the teaching and learning of non-language content.

DECISION-MAKERS: This means any category of staff with duties in education management, assessment, training, guidance and inspection, and responsible authorities at local, regional and national level and within ministries.

EUROPEAN ADDED VALUE: This relates to the specific benefits and synergies from European cooperation which constitute a distinctive European dimension in addition to actions and policies at Member State level.

EUROPEAN DIMENSION: Moving from a national to a wider (European) context through exchange, cooperation and mobility between educational and training institutions and their staff and pupils.

EUROPEAN COMMISSION: The European Commission is the administrative and executive body which advises the European Union, implements its decisions, and helps it attain its goals. Other key duties are defending the interests of Europe's citizens and ensuring that EU legislation is applied correctly. The Commission has the power to make proposals, but the main decisions on EU policies and priorities are the responsibility of the Council of the European Union – whose members are ministers from the Member States' governments – and the European Parliament.

EUROPEAN OFFICIAL LANGUAGES: Български (BG – Bulgarian), Čeština (CS – Czech), Dansk (DA – Danish), Deutsch (DE – German), Eesti (ET – Estonian), Elinika (EL – Greek), English (EN), Español (ES – Spanish), Français (FR – French), Gaeilge (GA – Irish), Italiano (IT – Italian), Latviešu valoda (LV – Latvian), Lietuvių kalba (LT – Lithuanian), Magyar (HU – Hungarian), Malti (MT – Maltese), Nederlands (NL – Dutch), Polski (PL – Polish), Português (PT – Portuguese), Română (RO – Romanian), Slovenčina (SK – Slovak), Slovenščina (SL – Slovene), Suomi (FI – Finnish), Svenska (SV – Swedish)



EUROPEAN UNION: The European Union is the result of a process of cooperation and integration which began in 1951. In 1957 six countries (Belgium, Germany, France, Italy, Luxembourg and the Netherlands) signed the Rome treaty to create what became the European Community. In 1993 this in turn became the European Union, with the signature of the Maastricht Treaty. More than fifty years on from the Rome treaty, the EU today has 27 Member States: Belgium, Bulgaria, Czech Republic, Denmark, Germany, Greece, Estonia, Spain, France, Ireland, Italy, Cyprus, Latvia, Lithuania, Luxembourg, Hungary, Malta, the Netherlands, Austria, Poland, Portugal, Romania, Slovenia, Slovak Republic, Finland, Sweden and the United Kingdom.

LESS WIDELY USED AND LESS TAUGHT LANGUAGES (LWULT): This refers to languages that are not commonly taught, whether they are official languages of the countries participating in the Lifelong Learning Programme, regional minority or migrant languages. Comenius School Partnerships can help to improve the teaching of these languages, increase access to learning opportunities in them, and encourage the exchange of learning materials and of information and best practices.

LIFELONG LEARNING PROGRAMME (LLP): The Lifelong Learning Programme was established by Decision 1720/2006/EC of the European Parliament and of the Council of 15 November 2006 (Official Journal L327 of 24/11/2006). The general objective of the LLP is to contribute through lifelong learning to the development of the European Union as an advanced knowledge society, with sustainable economic development, more and better jobs and greater social cohesion. In particular, it aims to foster interchange, cooperation and mobility between education and training systems so that they become a world quality reference. The LLP is the legal framework for the Comenius Programme.

LINGUISTIC PREPARATION: Linguistic preparation should take place before or during a stay abroad and could consist of extra lessons in the language concerned and/or the purchase of material for autonomous learning (CD-ROMS, books, etc.).

MOBILITY: In the context of the Lifelong Learning Programme, “mobility” is a period of time spent in another participating country in order to undertake study, work experience, other learning or teaching activity or related administrative activity. In Comenius School Partnerships, a mobility is a trip abroad carried out in the framework of the partnership. This trip can be either a visit to a partner school (e.g. a project meeting or a study visit) or the participation in an event organised by a project or network, supported by the LLP or one of its predecessor programmes.

MONITORING: Monitoring is the regular observation and recording of activities taking place within a programme or project. It is a process of routinely gathering information on all project-related aspects. At the level of a Comenius School Partnership, it should enable the partners to detect any deviation from the initial operational objectives and to correct them, and to improve performance. National Agencies support the monitoring of School Partnerships by organising meetings and providing assistance in this process.

NATIONAL AGENCY: Each country participating in the Lifelong Learning Programme has appointed an organisation to promote and administer the education activities funded under the programme. This organisation is called the National Agency. As regards Comenius School Partnership projects, the National Agency in your country is your contact point.



NON-GOVERNMENTAL ORGANISATIONS (NGOs): In its broadest sense, a non-governmental organisation is one that is not directly part of the structure of government. Many NGOs are also not-for-profit organisations. They may be funded by private donations, by international organisations, by government itself or by any combination of these.

PARTNERSHIP: In the context of the Lifelong Learning Programme, the term “partnership” refers to a specific type of small-scale European cooperation projects funded under Comenius, Grundtvig and Leonardo da Vinci. Comenius School Partnerships can be either bilateral (between two institutions in two participating countries) or multilateral (three or more institutions in three or more countries).

PRE-SCHOOL: Organised educational activity undertaken before the start of obligatory primary schooling.

PROJECT: A project is a temporary and one-off endeavour to create a product or service which brings about beneficial change or added value. Projects funded under the Lifelong Learning Programme are in general cooperation activities between institutions or organisations in different participating countries.

PUPIL: Person enrolled in a learning capacity at a school (as defined in this glossary).

SCHOOL: All types of institutions providing general (nursery, primary or secondary), vocational or technical education below the level of higher education (ISCED levels 0 to 3), including special schools and institutions not normally called schools, but which provide education of the type described. Each country taking part in Comenius publishes a list of all types of

schools that can participate. In case of doubt you might contact your National Agency in order to check whether your institution is regarded as a school and can take part in Comenius School Partnerships.

SPECIAL NEEDS EDUCATION: Education that focuses on the teaching of students with academic, behavioural, health or physical needs that cannot sufficiently be met using traditional educational techniques.

STUDY VISIT: A short-term visit, made to study a particular aspect of lifelong learning in another Member State.

TEACHER/EDUCATIONAL STAFF: People who, through their duties, are involved directly in the educational process, in line with the organisation of their respective education systems.

TRANSNATIONAL: This means operating across national boundaries. Almost every EU programme requires a transnational element of some kind as a way of achieving cooperation between Member States.

TRANSNATIONAL MOBILITY: This refers to the cross-border exchanges and visits that take place between partners in a Comenius School Partnership. Grant agreements for Comenius School Partnerships specify a minimum number of mobilities to be carried out. They include participation in e. g. project meetings, class exchanges, teacher exchanges, or study visits.



WHAT IS COMENIUS?

Comenius supports different types of activities.

- **Comenius School Partnerships**, the subject of this handbook, promote cooperation between all kinds of institutions which provide general, vocational or technical education from pre-school to upper secondary, including special schools and institutions not normally called schools but which provide education of the type described.
- **eTwinning partnerships** have the same objectives and targets as Comenius School Partnerships, but they focus on using information and communication technologies (ICT) to enhance cooperation. Rather than funding individual projects, eTwinning offers advice, ideas, tools, training and recognition to make school collaboration easier. It complements the approach of Comenius School Partnerships, and is often used to continue a completed Comenius School Partnership, or to deepen cooperation in one still underway, or to prepare for participation in one. **eTwinning is not covered by this handbook**, for further information, please refer to the European eTwinning website at www.etwinning.net.
- **Comenius In-Service Training** enables school education staff to participate in training activities, e.g. courses or job-shadowing, in other European countries.
- **Comenius Assistantships** are foreseen to give future teachers a chance to assist in teaching in a school in another European country.
- **Comenius Multilateral Projects** aim at developing, promoting and disseminating educational best practice, including new teaching methods and materials, developing or exchanging experiences on information systems for learners, teachers or other education staff, and developing, promoting and disseminating new teacher-training courses or course content.
- **Comenius Networks** aim at networking among projects and institutions which are or have been involved in any other Comenius action. They are also intended to offer thematic and content support to Multilateral Projects and School Partnerships.



1. WHAT IS COMENIUS?

Comenius is part of the European Community's Lifelong Learning Programme, which was launched in 2007. Like its predecessor programmes Socrates, Leonardo da Vinci and eLearning, the Lifelong Learning Programme seeks, among other goals, to promote cooperation and mobility, and to strengthen the European dimension in education.

Comenius addresses school education, and is guided by two overall objectives. It seeks to develop knowledge and understanding among young people and education staff of the diversity of European cultures and languages, and the value of this diversity. And it aims to help young people to acquire basic life skills and competences for their personal development, for future employment and for active European citizenship.

You can find more information on the Lifelong Learning Programme and Comenius on the following website:

<http://ec.europa.eu/lfp>

1.1. WHY SHOULD WE GET INVOLVED IN COMENIUS SCHOOL PARTNERSHIPS?

You might indeed ask why you should add yet another item to your already full agenda. There is no denying that involvement in European cooperation means work – as does any cooperation. However, there are many benefits for everyone involved in a Comenius School Partnership, and approximately 25,000 schools, their teachers and staff, and several million pupils throughout Europe who have been involved until now can testify to this.

A 2007 study of the impact on participating schools¹ showed that Comenius School Partnerships not only raise the intercultural competence of pupils and teachers, but also have a positive influence on everyday life in schools. Nearly 8,000 teachers from participating schools all over Europe responded to a questionnaire on how they viewed the impact that the School

Partnership had on their institution. The survey revealed that more than 80 % of teachers noticed that pupils became more interested in other countries and cultures². They considerably improved their knowledge about living and school life in partner countries, and also showed more tolerance towards other cultures and people from other countries. 90% of the teachers also improved their own knowledge and understanding of the partner countries' school systems, and 82% established lasting personal contacts with teachers from partner schools.

More than 75% of the pupils became more motivated to learn foreign languages; 62 % improved their proficiency in English substantially, and 23% did so in another language. In addition, two-thirds of the teachers improved their English skills, and one third also gained better skills in a language other than English.

¹ The study was conducted in 2007 by the Gesellschaft für Empirische Studien in Kassel, Germany. The report is published on the following web site: http://ec.europa.eu/education/doc/reports/index_en.html

² Percentages refer to number of teachers who assessed the impact on the various competences as "very substantial" or "substantial".



Teachers reported that more than 70% of the pupils boosted their social skills and their ability to work in teams. According to their teachers' assessments, two-thirds gained specialist knowledge and ICT competences, and became more self confident and motivated to learn. Moreover, 75% of the teachers improved their capacity to work in interdisciplinary teams. They also encountered new subject matter and learned about new teaching methods.

The survey showed that Comenius School Partnerships led to an improvement in the school climate (in 60% of cases) and a boost to interdisciplinary approaches to teaching and learning. A huge majority of all teachers (79%) considered that there was a stronger European dimension in their school as a result.

1.2. COMENIUS SCHOOL PARTNERSHIPS: WHAT ARE THEY?

Comenius School Partnerships promote European cooperation between groups of pupils and teachers from different European countries. They involve schools from the countries that participate in the Lifelong Learning Programme: the 27 Member States of the European Union, plus Iceland, Norway, Liechtenstein and Turkey. Switzerland, Croatia and the Former Yugoslavian Republic of Macedonia are expected to join the programme during the coming years.

Most Comenius School Partnerships are based on the participation of at least three schools from three countries, and are funded for two years. The aim is for Comenius School Partnerships to be geographically balanced, i.e. partners should preferably come from different parts of Europe, and there should not be an imbalance with many partners coming from the same

country. One of the partner schools has to be located in one of the Member States of the European Union. In fact, some National Agencies only provide funding for one or, at the most, two schools per project in their country (contact your National Agency for more information). One school in the partnership will act as a coordinating school responsible for administrative and management tasks.

WHAT DOES IT MEAN TO BE A “COORDINATOR”?

When planning a Comenius School Partnership, you and your partners have to decide who should act as a coordinator. But what does that mean?

The coordinating institution is responsible for finalising and submitting the application to its National Agency. The other institutions – called “partner institutions” – submit a signed copy of this application to their National Agencies (see Chapter 2.4).

There are no other predefined roles or tasks allocated to the coordinator, and all partners will have to discuss and define the role of the coordinator. The coordinator might be no more than the formal leading institution, but often the coordinating institution also keeps an eye on the overall development of the school partnership, monitors its progress, and acts as a contact point. It can be helpful if the coordinating institution has some experience in implementing international or European school partnerships, but this is not essential. In any case, the coordinator is also one of the partners and engaged with project work in its own school.

Each school participating in a Comenius School Partnership is responsible for the activities taking place in its own school. Each school has to report to its own National Agency and demonstrate that it has implemented the activities planned. It should be also noted that there is no additional funding foreseen for the coordinating school.



Beside so-called Multilateral Comenius School Partnerships, you can also apply for Bilateral Comenius School Partnerships, which consist of two schools each from a different country. Bilateral partnerships focus their activities on language learning and include reciprocal class exchanges. The following chapter will give you an insight into the characteristics of both types of Comenius School Partnerships.

1.3. CONTENT AND ORIENTATION

1.3.1. Multilateral School Partnerships

The cooperation between partner schools gives the participants in a Comenius School Partnership an opportunity to explore one another's countries, cultures, and ways of thinking and living, and to understand and appreciate them better. It can focus on themes broadly linked to the pupils' curriculum and interests, or on questions of school management, teaching techniques and methodologies.

Objectives, structures and activities

According to your objectives, the structure and the activities within a School Partnership can vary. In particular, if you plan a School Partnership which focuses on pupils' interests and on promoting cooperation, you should consider involving pupils actively in all aspects – the planning, the execution, and the evaluation of the activities. Experience shows that the active participation of pupils in cooperation is one of the key factors for successful partnerships. But even in partnerships focused more on school management or the exchange of methodologies, the involvement of pupils can be an asset.

PUPILS' INVOLVEMENT

One of the findings of the impact study mentioned above was that Comenius School Partnerships which involve pupils in the planning, implementation and evaluation of the partnership usually show a greater impact on pupils' competences. Pupils improve their abilities to work autonomously and in settings they organise themselves; and they show greater self-confidence and motivation to learn. Team work among teachers and pupils from different countries within a partnership also gives a unique opportunity to experience the European dimension.

"I believe the major impact and gain from the Comenius programme was the contact with other countries' educational systems, knowing how other schools work, meeting new people with a different mentality and way of thinking and living."

(Teacher from a Greek school which participated in a Comenius School Partnership)

Partnerships should provide an added value to traditional learning and teaching, by bringing in new and creative approaches. The greatest success is with cross-curricular projects that are integrated into the regular curriculum of the participating pupils. Integrating a European project into the curriculum may not seem that easy at the outset. You and your colleagues may have to rearrange your classes, and administrative arrangements may initially pose difficulties. The solution lies largely in making the project fit naturally into your existing curriculum, rather than adding to the workload. You may even find your project theme within the curriculum. Remember that projects which have been successfully integrated into the curriculum and which involve several subjects tend to be the most rewarding ones!



Comenius School Partnerships tackling school management and educational issues can provide the opportunity to test and put into practice the most effective organisational and educational approaches in participating schools.

Topics and themes

Since Comenius School Partnerships focus on the interests, needs and problems that are common to your school and your partner schools, there can be no exhaustive list of potential topics. You will have to discuss and agree with your partners the areas of cooperation that will make the partnership useful and interesting to everyone involved.

It is crucial for a successful partnership that the topic motivates both pupils and teachers to explore, exchange information, and learn from others. Since interest in the topic is one of the driving forces of any project, it is worth taking the time to reflect carefully before agreeing a choice, and making sure that each school is equally committed to it.

There are several advantages in cross-curricular topics where several curricular subjects are brought into the project. In this way, teachers from different subjects and pupils from different classes are brought together into a project involving the entire school. Such partnerships tend to be more sustainable than when only one teacher or one subject is involved. In addition, they allow creative combinations of subjects – such as history, maths, and art in a project on construction techniques in the partner countries, for instance.

School partnerships can also focus on cooperation with support structures outside the school, the links between your school and the world of work, quality management in schools, or topics such as migration, equal opportunities and inclusive education. What is important is that the topic should be inspiring for all participants, because that will make it easier to develop approaches, materials, and tools which will be really useful, and which can be put to use not only in your partnership, but also in other schools with similar interests.

Products and results

The end products of Comenius School Partnerships vary greatly: some have tangible outcomes, such as a booklet, a brochure, or a DVD/CD-ROM. Pupils have prepared exhibitions of local trades and crafts, put on artistic performances, or produced videos. Since Comenius School Partnerships focus on the process of cooperation, the entire experience of being involved is also an “end product” in itself. Whatever form the end product takes, remember that it is a powerful incentive for working on the project!



SMALL SCHOOLS – BIG OPPORTUNITIES

SCHOOL TYPE:

General primary schools with classes of mixed-age pupils

PROJECT CONTENT AND ACTIVITIES:



Five schools from five countries (Norway, France, Spain, United Kingdom and Slovenia) participated in this project. As they are all located in rural areas, small in size and teach classes containing pupils

of different age, they have different needs and face different challenges from other schools. Their main aim was to develop appropriate teaching material, which is currently difficult to find and often has to be adapted for the special needs of mixed-age classes. During its duration the project focused on the teaching of reading, science and outdoor education.

ROLE OF PUPILS:

Children actively participated in project activities, including a “Book Week” and a “Science Week”. Some pupils took part in the project meetings in the partner countries.

END PRODUCTS/RESULTS:

Website: <http://www2.arnes.si/~ossqpo2s/Comenius>; teaching material, including a booklet of science experiments for mixed-age groups “4 Elements: Water, Air, Fire, Earth”.

EUROPEAN YOUNG READERS PRIZE

SCHOOL TYPE:

General secondary schools

AGE OF PUPILS:

14–19 years old

PROJECT CONTENT AND ACTIVITIES:

The “European Young Readers Prize” which served as a basis for this project was created to give young people the opportunity to discover contemporary European literature, and other countries in Europe. It aimed to promote openness to new and less-familiar experiences by encouraging the reading of a selection of contemporary European books, and nominating the best book as winner of the prize. Schools not only encouraged pupils to read the books and to visit other participating countries, but also organized exhibitions, meetings with the nominated authors, and competitions for the best reviews. Five schools, from Poland, France, Bulgaria, Luxembourg and Romania, participated in this project.

INTEGRATION INTO THE CURRICULUM:

Students discussed books they read during regular classes. The writing contests for the best reviews were also incorporated into the curriculum.

CROSS-CURRICULAR IMPACT:

Pupils from different classes and teachers of different subjects were involved, and the project not only enhanced pupils’ knowledge of modern European literature, but also improved their skills in critical thinking and negotiation.

END PRODUCTS:

A brochure and a CD with the project presentation were produced; website <http://www.comeniustrzemeszno.republika.pl>.

THE INCLUSIVE SCHOOL

SCHOOL TYPE:

General secondary schools

PROJECT CONTENT AND ACTIVITIES:



Participating schools focused on the concept of “an inclusive school”, its definition and strategies. The partnership aimed at developing methods and tools to allow pupils with special educational needs to remain within mainstream schooling, to describe the specific needs of every pupil, and to improve coordination between educational psychologists, teachers and others. The project was implemented by schools from Denmark, Spain, Ireland, the Czech Republic, Norway and the UK.

INVOLVEMENT OF OTHER PLAYERS:

Educational psychologists, social workers, parents.

ROLE OF PUPILS:

Teaching methodologies for children with special educational needs were tested during regular classes in participating schools.

END PRODUCTS/RESULTS:

New methods to teach pupils with special needs have been developed.
Website www.inclusiveschool.com.

MULTI-SENSORIAL STIMULATION FOR LEARNERS WITH SPECIAL LEARNING NEEDS

SCHOOL TYPE:

Schools for children with special learning needs

PROJECT CONTENT AND ACTIVITIES:



This school partnership fostered cooperation and exchange of experiences in multi-sensorial stimulation for pupils with special learning needs. The schools from Spain, the United Kingdom, Estonia, Portugal and Sweden exchanged teaching methods, materials and practices, and developed teachers' competences and training in this field. Overall, the project aimed at designing and promoting teaching techniques that help combat social exclusion and ease the social integration of learners with special needs.

CROSS-CURRICULAR IMPACT:

Acquisition of new teaching methods, improvement in the attention of special needs pupils. Teachers of different subjects were involved in the project.

END PRODUCTS:

Posters, a CD-ROM collecting project materials, a practice guide and a theoretical manual focusing on multi-sensorial stimulation for learners with special learning needs; the Spanish school also created two “stimulation rooms” as a result of the project.

1.3.2. Bilateral School Partnerships

Bilateral School Partnerships are designed to enable close cooperation between two schools, to improve pupils' motivation and their capacity to communicate in foreign languages. They are based on joint work by pupils and teachers on a chosen topic. The activities should not be concentrated only within the class exchanges, but be integrated into the pupils' regular curriculum. Pupils should be actively involved in planning, monitoring and evaluation. The projects include reciprocal exchanges of pupils, aged 12 and older, visiting the partner school for a minimum of ten days. An integral part of bilateral partnerships is working towards an end product, which should be jointly produced by the two groups of pupils and should ideally be multilingual.

The end product not only motivates pupils, but also enables all parties to see and enjoy what the pupils have learned and achieved, e.g. how much their competence in a foreign language has increased. Some imagination is necessary to choose an end product, as the possibilities are vast. The pupils could for example produce an anthology of poetry on a chosen theme, a bilingual glossary of technical terms, or a video, or write and perform a play or create a musical performance.

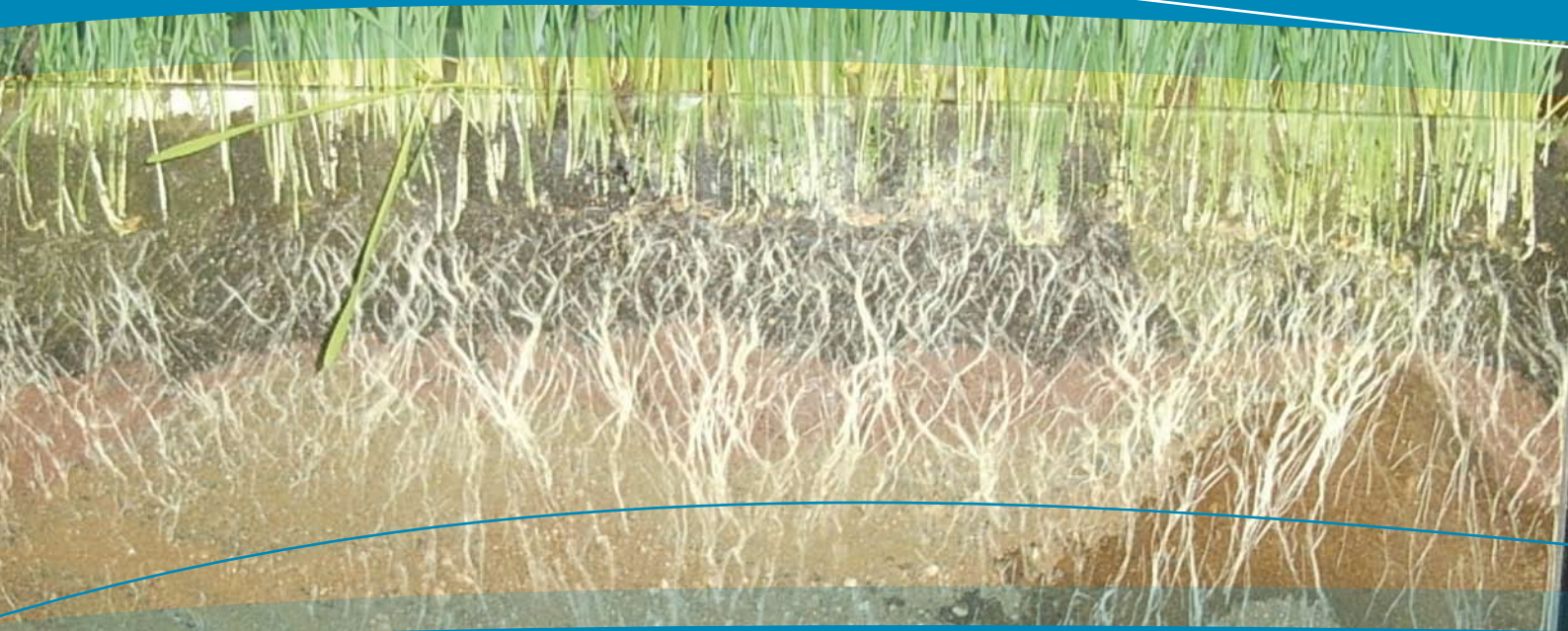
Bilateral Comenius School Partnerships do not seek to provide formal language teaching. They aim to create conditions in which pupils can communicate in a foreign language in real situations, incidentally improving pupils' linguistic competence and motivation to learn languages. The actual use of the language of the other partner depends on the degree to which the pupils master the language in question. In case pupils in

one or both partner institutions have little or no knowledge of each other's language, they will be expected to learn at least some of the partner's language. If necessary, a third language can also be used.

When planning a Bilateral Comenius School Partnership you should keep in mind that partnerships which have to use a third language for communication are not less valuable, as they improve the fluency in that language and give pupils an insight into languages which may be less often used and taught. You could also think of techniques of inter-comprehension if the language of your partner belongs to a language family familiar to your pupils.

Both partner schools should benefit from the Bilateral School Partnership. Looking for a partner school where the first language is part of your curriculum might offer many opportunities to your pupils, but not necessarily serve the needs or interests of the potential partner.

Where the language of the partner is not on the curriculum of the pupils, a minimum of 20 hours introduction to the language is recommended before the exchange. It may seem difficult to integrate a partnership activity into the regular curriculum of the participating pupils for the reasons mentioned earlier. Therefore, if your institution has certain days, weeks, blocks, periods or seasons set aside for special activities, it might be useful to use them for the joint project work. The following examples illustrate different kinds of bilateral School Partnerships and in particular how cross-curricular projects can be integrated into regular school work.



HEALTHY EATING

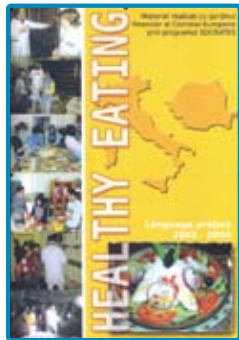
SCHOOL TYPE:

Technical-vocational schools

AGE OF PUPILS:

15–17 years old

PROJECT CONTENT AND ACTIVITIES:



The idea behind the project developed by two schools from Italy and Romania was to raise pupils' awareness of the importance of healthy eating and to teach and apply its principles. Pupils learned to distinguish food quality and to prepare healthy meals, to combat obesity. They also focused on the link between food production and environmental protection, the reasoning in using ecologically produced food, and the culinary habits and traditions in both participating countries.

INTEGRATION INTO THE CURRICULUM:

Project activities were integrated into the two schools' curricula by creating special catering classes and targeted foreign language classes. Students also developed ICT skills by creating a website.

CROSS-CURRICULAR IMPACT:

The project approached the themes of health, environment and the world of work in an innovative way, by cooperating with specialists such as doctors, representatives of the consumer protection services, specialists from ecological farms and agro-tourism managers.

END PRODUCTS:

Participating pupils jointly produced a bilingual cookery book with Romanian and Italian traditional recipes and a bilingual glossary with specific food terminology, and presented the results on an Internet site.

HOW THE LANGUAGE OF MATHEMATICS CAN CONNECT PEOPLE

SCHOOL TYPE:

General secondary and vocational schools



AGE OF PUPILS:

15–17 years old

PROJECT CONTENT AND ACTIVITIES:

Within this Language Project students from the Czech Republic and Ireland tried to communicate with one another by focusing on mathematical and statistical information. The aim was to demonstrate that maths is not a boring and abstract school subject, but can be an important vehicle for communicating, developing creativity, and amusement. The project set out to examine how mathematics forms a substantial part of our lives and can be applied to everyday situations.

INTEGRATION INTO THE CURRICULUM:

The project themes were aligned with the curriculum of participating pupils and the activities took place during regular classes.

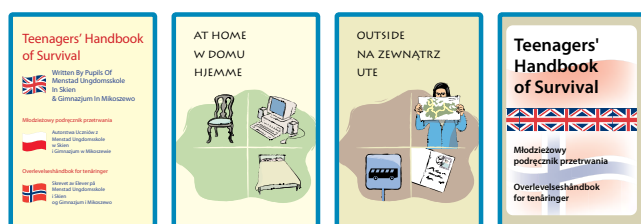
CROSS-CURRICULAR IMPACT:

The project had four strands – history of mathematics, business and banking, maths quizzes and class exchanges – and brought together teachers of different subjects. Students, staff, management and affiliated partners exchanged ideas and resources about industrial and business backgrounds in their regions.

END PRODUCTS:

A brochure outlining the project's results, an Irish-English-Czech dictionary of the most frequent terms, a DVD of photographs and film on the class exchange, and web pages containing mathematical tasks and quizzes.

TEENAGERS' HANDBOOK



SCHOOL TYPE:

General secondary schools

AGE OF PUPILS:

14–16 years old

PROJECT CONTENT AND ACTIVITIES:

This School Partnership took as its starting point the needs that teenagers might well have for survival tools in unknown surroundings, particularly in a foreign country. It aimed at broadening the linguistic offer at the two participating schools in Norway and Poland, and enabling the students to express themselves in languages that are not taught in their schools.

The project also included class exchanges and offered the possibility to learn more about the daily life of project partners.

INTEGRATION INTO THE CURRICULUM:

Project activities, including Norwegian and Polish classes, were aligned with the pupils' curriculum. Surprise – and sometimes astonishment – at the living conditions in the partner country taught the students an important lesson about tolerance and intercultural communication.

CROSS-CURRICULAR IMPACT:

Teams of pupils and teachers worked together on the project.

END PRODUCTS:

The final product "Teenagers Handbook – A Survival Tool for Teenagers" in Polish, Norwegian and English, could become a key to two cultures that have not traditionally had much contact.

1.4. MOBILITY WITHIN PROJECTS

Mobility occupies a central place within Comenius School Partnerships, and a minimum number of transnational mobilities are required to qualify for the full grant. Besides providing opportunities for personal and professional development, these mobilities are intended to strengthen the partnership and deepen its collaborative nature. When planning with your partners, you need to discuss the role that teacher and pupil mobility will play in the development of your Comenius School Partnership, and define the number of mobilities you want to carry out.

In addition to project meetings and class exchanges, you could think about head-teacher study visits at your partner school, or teacher exchanges. It is also possible to attend events organised by Multilateral Projects and Networks funded under the Lifelong Learning Programme or its predecessor programmes, e.g. a Comenius Network conference.



CHECKLIST: THE INITIAL DECISION

More specifically, you could pose questions such as:

- Which subject areas, themes, topics could be covered?
- What planning and organisation needs to take place?
- Which staff, teachers, pupils and classes etc. are interested in participating?
- What support can be sought from governmental and local authorities, parents associations, education authorities, the local community or the local media?
- What teaching and learning methods and other pedagogical approaches should be developed and how could they be related to the school management?
- What resources/skills are available and what additional resources/skills can be acquired? What other countries might be involved?

Remember that your Comenius School Partnership should:

- deal with a topic of interest to all partners,
- be fully supported by the school management, and
- if possible involve parents and raise their enthusiasm and commitment.



2. HOW TO SET UP A COMENIUS SCHOOL PARTNERSHIP?

2.1. THE INITIAL DECISION

The initial impulse to become involved in a Comenius School Partnership normally comes from an individual member of staff or from a small group of like-minded colleagues. However, it is vital for success that this initial enthusiasm spreads to the entire school community, including senior managers, school administrators and support staff, parents and the community which the school serves. At this very first stage, it would therefore be useful to have internal meetings within your school in order to clarify the purpose of the Comenius School Partnership you want to undertake, and to discuss all its possible perspectives.

The experience of a large number of participating schools has shown the crucial importance of keeping an open mind and being open to discussion when planning a Comenius School Partnership. Try also to be aware that a school partnership is not “owned” by you or any other colleague; rather, it is a creative outcome of equitable collaboration between all participating schools. All partners should therefore have an equal say in planning a Comenius School Partnership and in developing its activities.

CHECKLIST: HOW TO FIND PARTNERS

- Personal contacts, both private and professional, are a good starting point. You yourself, your family, your friends, your colleagues, or the head of your school may know teachers abroad who would be interested in setting up a school partnership with you and your school.
- The local or regional authorities may also be able to help you. They may have “twinning” arrangements or other close contacts with their counterparts in other European countries, and could put you in touch with interested schools in their area.
- Comenius In-Service Training courses and Study Visits may also lead you to potential partners.
- The partner-finding tool (*TwinFinder*) and the partner-finding forums for schools registered in the eTwinning website have been designed for schools that wish to set up an eTwinning project, but they can also be used for contacting potential partners for a Comenius School Partnership.
- You may also find partners through so-called contact seminars. National Agencies in the countries participating in Comenius arrange contact seminars focused on a particular theme, where you can meet colleagues from schools interested in starting a Comenius School Partnership. You can apply for a grant for preparatory visits in order to take part in contact seminars (see next section for details). You can contact your National Agency for further information on such a contact seminar.

2.2. HOW TO FIND PARTNERS

Finding partners might seem somewhat daunting at first. However, there are several ways to go about it, ranging from personal contacts to events and initiatives which have been expressly developed for the single purpose of helping you to find partners.

You should invest some time in the search for the right partner school. It is important to know your partners well before entering into a cooperation project which will last two years and is intended to produce valuable outcomes!

2.3. PREPARATORY VISITS

2.3.1. What are they?

Schools can apply to their National Agency for a grant to undertake a preparatory visit. Such a visit lasts up to five days and enables you to meet your potential partners and discuss and develop your idea for a Comenius School Partnership together. It's also an opportunity to start building the personal relationships on which a successful Comenius School Partnership depends, and to start filling in the application for funding. It will

enable you to get to know the partner schools (school buildings, the level of ICT equipment etc.), their school systems and their cultures. You can discuss issues such as the work plan, the roles and tasks of the coordinating school and the partner schools, means of communication, languages to be used and mobility activities to be undertaken in the course of the partnership project. In order to derive maximum benefit from the visit, try to exchange as much information as possible with your potential partners on your school and your educational system. The most effective visit is one where all the partners meet one another.

Participation in contact seminars can be funded, in the same way as preparatory visits. If you receive funding for taking part in a contact seminar, you usually cannot receive funding for another preparatory visit. You can apply for and may get a preparatory visit grant that covers actual travel costs and travel insurance costs, and includes a contribution to the subsistence costs.

It is important to keep in mind that costs relating to the replacement of teachers will not be covered.

To apply for a preparatory visit, you will need to fill in a standard application form, which is available from your National Agency. National Agencies in each country will fix their own closing dates for submitting the applications, so you need to contact your National Agency to find out how and when to apply.

No funding is available to meet the costs incurred by the school hosting a preparatory visit; participants should cover all costs





CHECKLIST: WHAT TO TAKE INTO ACCOUNT WHEN FIRST MEETING WITH YOUR PARTNERS

- What are your reasons for wanting to take part in a Comenius School Partnership and what do you expect of the meeting?
- Which staff, how many pupils and which age groups are to be involved in each school?
- How will you communicate? In which language(s), by what means and how often?
- What budget will each institution apply for? How many mobilities should each partner school carry out?
- What are possible themes for the project, and which curriculum areas are likely to be involved, either directly or indirectly?
- How will the theme be developed in each school?
- What type of end product will be developed and how could it be used in the future? Is the end product of interest to other possible users?
- Which school will coordinate the School Partnership, and what tasks will the participating schools take on?
- What equipment, resources, expertise and contacts will each school bring to the project?
- How will data be collected, progress monitored and information about the partnership disseminated?
- When and in which country should meetings be held? It is useful to build them into your planning from the start.
- What will happen if key personnel change?
- What will happen to the partnership if one of the schools in the partnership wishes to withdraw or is rejected in the selection?
- What are the possibilities for continued cooperation after the two years of a funded Comenius School Partnership? Is there any interest in developing long lasting cooperation?
- What will happen next if the proposal is rejected?

related to their own participation. The “travelling” partners have to submit the preparatory visit application to their National Agency. For visiting schools, up to two persons per school can get a grant to participate in the visit. Should a preparatory visit be undertaken in good faith and prove unsuccessful, the school will not be required to return the grant. The person undertaking the visit will, however, have to provide a full account of expenditure and an explanatory report of the visit to the National Agency concerned.

Since preparatory visits are designed to pave the way for a Comenius School Partnership they must take place before the application is submitted.

2.3.2. What to take into account when first meeting with your partners

This is a crucial meeting, as the decisions taken will affect the development of the whole Comenius School Partnership. Be prepared to negotiate as you have never negotiated before, and to use your communication and diplomatic skills to the full! Other very useful skills are tolerance, patience, flexibility and a sense of humour.

Apart from deciding the location of the meeting, it cannot be over-emphasised how advisable it is to have agreed upon a clearly-defined agenda prior to the meeting, and upon who will chair it. However much ground you have managed to cover in advance, you will need to work through the items listed below. Remember that a preparatory visit where all partners meet is an excellent opportunity to start filling in the application form!

CHECKLIST: WHAT TO TAKE WITH YOU?

You should also give some thought to what you will take with you.

The following checklist may contain some useful prompts:

- this handbook, the relevant parts of the Guide for Applicants, the Call for Proposals and any other reference material you may obtain,
- application forms – there will be many occasions during the meeting when you will want to check out technical points, and you may not be able to rely on your partners to find an immediate answer,
- a letter of greeting and support for the partner schools from the head of your school and possibly the chair of the governors or managers, along with messages from the pupils who may take part in the project,
- information on your school – for example a school brochure, relevant planning and curriculum documents, vacation schedules – and information about the educational system in your country/region,
- a stock of lists of contact names, telephone and fax numbers and email addresses to hand out,
- photographs, a video and/or audio recording to give an impression of your school and the area it serves (but check that your equipment is compatible), and a camera,
- tourist information about the area in which your school is located, including posters,
- gifts, particularly ones which have some relevance to your school and its local community – take more than you expect to need because you may well find yourself meeting more people and being given more hospitality and presents than you had anticipated.

When going on a preparatory visit, it is important to be aware of:

- any cultural differences between the countries participating in the school partnership,
- different priorities and focus in the partnership,
- varying levels of language competence.



2.4. PREPARING THE APPLICATION FOR FUNDING

2.4.1. How to go about it?

The closing date for Comenius School Partnership applications is announced in the Lifelong Learning Programme Call for Proposals, which is available on the websites of the European Commission and the National Agencies. The application form is a joint application form for the whole project, including information on each participating school. You and your partners need to fill in the application form together.

The coordinating school will submit the application form to its National Agency and provide copies of this final version to each partner school (in electronic and/or paper format). The partners submit a paper copy of the application, signed by the legal representative of their institution, to their National Agency. This ensures that all relevant National Agencies receive the application and are in the position to organise the assessment and the selection. Applicants should check if their National Agency asks for any additional information which is not part of the common application form. Usually this information is mentioned in the national calls for proposal and displayed on the Agency's web site.



TYPICAL QUESTIONS TO BE ANSWERED IN THE APPLICATION FORM

What are the concrete aims of the Partnership?

What impact is the Partnership expected to have on the participants and other interested parties (on the pupils, teachers, institutions, local community, wider educational community)?

How do you intend to evaluate the progress of the Partnership and its impact?

How do you intend to disseminate and use the results, experience and end products?

Please describe the role and tasks of all institutions involved in the Partnership.

How will effective communication and cooperation between the participating institutions be ensured?

How will pupils and/or staff be involved in the planning, implementation and evaluation of activities?

How will the partnership activities be integrated into the curriculum of the participating pupils and/or the ongoing activities of the participating institutions?

If you have planned specific activities around the objectives or priorities of the Comenius programme, please explain in detail the concrete measures you intend to take.

For Bilateral Partnerships only: What kind of preparation in the language of the partner country will be provided for the pupils participating in the Partnership? How will the pupils collaborate in practical terms during the visit to the partner school?

2.4.2. What makes a good application?

The Call for Proposals defines a set of criteria which guide the selection process. The first check will be to see if your school is eligible to apply for funding. All proposed partnerships, involving at least three eligible schools, are then evaluated by external experts, using the criteria published in the Call for Proposals. When drafting your application, you should have a look at these criteria and make sure that your application is in line with them.

In general a good application should demonstrate:

- clear objectives and realistic expected outcomes,
- a clear and coherent work plan,
- plans for the ongoing evaluation of the project,
- plans for the dissemination of product outcomes at local and regional, and, where possible, national level.

Comenius School Partnerships are cooperation projects where all partners have equal rights and obligations. The application should therefore make it clear that the activities have been agreed on by all partners and that all partners are equally committed to the partnership's activities. Remember that the application is your ticket to get funding for your Comenius School Partnership. Therefore, make sure that the joint application is explicit and clear, and completed in full, covering each of the partners involved in the partnership. Remember that no one is able to read your thoughts – ideas need to be spelled out! In this respect a critical friend could be useful; i.e. let someone who is not involved in the partnership read your application and give feedback on it.



As mentioned already, Comenius School Partnerships should meet the objectives of the Comenius programme presented in the Guide for Applicants and the Call for Proposals. Please note that the Commission can also publish annual priorities for Comenius School Partnerships. Applications meeting one or several of these priorities might be ranked higher in the selection process. However, applications will not be excluded if they don't meet the priorities. In some countries there might also be national priorities that you should consider. You will need to find out what are from your National Agency, or by downloading the full set of all national priorities from the European Commission's website.

2.5. SELECTION AND ENTERING INTO THE CONTRACT

2.5.1. The selection process

Comenius School Partnerships are transnational projects and undergo a European assessment. Each Partnership application is evaluated by experts nominated by the National Agency of the country of the coordinator. The process ensures that all experts apply the same criteria in assessing the applications. Applications which reach a minimum quality threshold will be ranked in a European list, and will be funded in the ranking order as long as there is sufficient funding available.

The annual budget for Comenius School Partnerships is managed by National Agencies. Each participating country is allocated a budget based on elements such as the size of its school population. In countries with a high demand for Comenius School Partnerships, it is not always possible to fund all applications, even when they are of adequate quality. Consequently, some Comenius School Partnerships find that not all partner schools can receive funding. Since Multilateral Partnerships need to have at

least three partners funded by their National Agencies, it is good to have at least four schools involved, to reduce the risk that the entire application fails because one school's application is turned down. However, very wide partnerships are not encouraged either, as they are more difficult to manage. If none of the partner schools has experience with running Comenius School Partnerships, you should not be too ambitious in the number of partners. For Bilateral Comenius School Partnerships, both you and your partner must be accepted for funding by the respective National Agencies.

Your National Agency will inform you of the results of the selection procedure before the planned start of activities.

2.5.2. What happens if your application is successful?

If your project has been selected, your National Agency will send you a grant agreement in which you commit to carrying out the activities described in your application and to respecting the contractual and reporting requirements. The grant agreement is a legal document, and it needs to be signed by the person legally authorised to sign it on behalf of your school. The National Agency will send you both copies of the agreement, which you will have to sign and return to the Agency. The Agreement will enter into force once the National Agency has signed it and returns your copy. After that the National Agency will transfer the grant to your school. The grant will be divided in two payments:

1. You will first get an advance of 80%: it is normally paid within a month from the National Agency's signature of the grant agreement.
2. You will receive the remaining 20% at the end of the Comenius School Partnership, on receipt of a satisfactory final report.



The grants are calculated in Euro. Agreements follow the school year, which for the purposes of Comenius runs from 1 August to 31 July. Agreements have a duration of two years.

2.5.3. Grant support and grant rules

The grant consists of a lump sum; the amount is specified according to the number of mobilities you plan to conduct. This offers you a lot of flexibility in the way you spend the grant. Besides financing transnational mobilities, you can also spend it for financing local project activities. There are different types of lump sums in relation to the number of planned mobilities. In order to be entitled to the total grant at the stage of the final report, your institution will need to carry out the minimum number of mobilities requested for that Partnership. Please check the Call for Proposals to get detailed information on the different types of lump sums available.

Please note that the grant amounts vary in different countries. Each National Agency defines the grant amounts to be used in its country, on the basis of its experience of average Partnership costs. You can find the lump sums for your country in the application form or on your National Agency's website.

2.5.4. Reporting

One of your responsibilities as part of the project activities is reporting to your National Agency on the progress of your Comenius School Partnership. The National Agency will provide you with the necessary report forms together with your grant agreement, where you can find more detailed information on when and how to report. The deadlines to submit the reports are specified in the grant agreement.

Please note that you will not be asked to submit a financial report, stating all your expenses in detail. But you should be able to prove that the minimum number of mobilities has been carried out and that the partnership project has been implemented as planned. Therefore you are obliged to keep e.g. travel tickets, boarding passes and certificates of attendance for each mobility made.

CHECKLIST: ORGANISING THE PARTNERSHIP

When starting a Comenius School Partnership, you may find it useful to reflect on the following advice given by teachers with experience in transnational projects:

- Make sure you let everyone in the school and in the local community know about the success of your application. Visibility and active support of the entire school, of parents and of the local community is vital for the success of the project.
- Exchange greetings with your partners and take practical steps to get the partnership under way, such as the simultaneous issue of press releases, or an exchange of letters of congratulation and renewed commitment. You might also decide to establish immediate contact between the participating pupils.
- Establish regular and effective communication between the coordinators in the partner schools, and among the staff of each participating school. It is important that the Comenius School Partnership takes on a life of its own as early as possible, and there is nothing better than a regular flow of information, questions, suggestions and greetings to achieve this.
- Agree on the means of communication to be used (e-mail, fax, post, telephone, video conferencing, computer chats...).
- Organise an early briefing meeting for colleagues in your school to renew and secure their enthusiasm and commitment.
- Make sure that theory and practice meet and that you can quickly share practical outcomes of the partnership with colleagues in your own school and in your partner schools – in particular with those who are not directly involved in the day-to-day running of the partnership. This will allow them to see that the Comenius School Partnership offers tangible and practical benefits and that they are dealing with real people who share their interests as fellow professionals.
- Make sure that everybody involved has a clear idea of the different phases of the Comenius School Partnership, and take note of one another's holidays dates, time zones, school day and exam times, not forgetting potential bureaucratic restraints such as limits on the use of phone, fax or e-mail.
- Record events, outcomes, data, successes and concerns as they happen. You will need to evaluate the project and to report on its progress, so getting this information down when it is fresh will be far easier than trying to remember it later at the evaluation and reporting stage.
- Keep all important documents, tickets and certificates which prove that mobilities have taken place.
- For your internal use, you will need to keep track of your expenses and monitor your budget. Please check with your hierarchy if you have to respect certain national rules when spending the grant.
- Be aware of the impact that staff changes can have on the partnership. Changes in staff have been the major cause of failure to date, so it is important to ensure that your partnership can withstand and survive changes in personnel.
- Keep your targets and time-scale under constant review.

CHECKLIST: HOW TO SET UP A WORK PLAN

Make sure that:

- effective channels of communication are established,
- the timetable is realistic in relation to the desired outcomes,
- there is an agreement regarding which partner does what and when,
- you have considered how you will monitor and evaluate the project.

You will need to set dates for:

- meetings: local meetings (colleagues, parents, representatives for local community) and transnational meetings with the partner schools,
- mobility activities,
- reporting and evaluation,
- delivery and exchange of products, files, etc.



3. THE COMENIUS SCHOOL PARTNERSHIP GETS UNDER WAY

Comenius School Partnerships are cooperation projects. Besides working collaboratively on the agreed themes, project management and communication with your partners are important and also time-consuming tasks within a European cooperation project.

This chapter should provide you with some useful hints on how to manage your Comenius School Partnership, but you might find it helpful to apply other project management techniques too. The more you plan your activities and discuss the best ways to organise the partnership and its internal communication, the easier will be the implementation of the partnership project, and the more time you will save later on.

3.1. ORGANISING THE PARTNERSHIP

Once you have received the grant agreement, be clear with your partners that the foundations for cooperation have been set. Experience has shown that frequent communication – both between and within the partner schools – is one of the key factors for the success of a Comenius School Partnership. Clarity, commitment and the will to compromise are other essential ingredients in the recipe for success.

3.2. HOW TO SET UP A WORK PLAN

The first thing to keep in mind in setting up a work plan is that the goal of the partnership should be attainable. Do not be over-ambitious! The main concern will be to agree on ways to organise the activities and on how to put ideas and plans into practice. Remember that the themes of your Comenius School Partnership should be integrated into regular class work and that pupils should actively participate in the activities. Clarity and coherence are keywords in a good work plan. Provided that you have a common understanding of the objectives and the content of the partnership, you can set up a work plan that will ensure a steady and consistent development of the partnership.

Make sure that you and your partners fully understand and agree on the work plan! The best way to achieve this is to have a jointly agreed work plan in writing.

3.3. TEAM BUILDING AT YOUR SCHOOL – WHOLE SCHOOL PROJECTS

Comenius School Partnerships provide teachers from different subject areas with the opportunity to participate in the development of a cross-curricular and transnational approach to the topic chosen for the partnership. In each school, a Comenius School Partnership should therefore involve a multidisciplinary team of teachers rather than being reserved to one teacher, or teachers from one subject. It is essential that the partnership is seen as the property of the whole school, and not of one or two enthusiastic teachers. School management, teaching staff and non-teaching staff should work together as a team in order to ensure a successful project.



CHECKLIST: INVOLVEMENT OF LOCAL COMMUNITY AND OTHER POTENTIAL PLAYERS

It is useful to find out about possibilities for cooperation with the following:

- local and regional bodies and organisations,
- associations working in the field of education, including students' associations,
- pupils' and teachers' associations, and parents' associations,
- social partners,
- teacher training institutions, higher education institutions and universities, research centres with expertise in the field of education, companies and consortia, professional bodies, trade organisations and chambers of commerce and industry.

A whole school partnership will make it easier to:

- put ideas into practice,
- motivate pupils and teachers,
- attract the attention and active support of parents,
- motivate non-teaching staff to give administrative and technical support,
- make the project known,
- attract the attention of educational decision-makers,
- attract the attention and support of the school board/inspectors.

A genuine whole school partnership makes it easier to integrate the partnership activities into the curriculum, and makes it more resistant to potential problems, such as changes in staff.

In partnerships which are focused on topics related to pupils' interests, all pupils should have the opportunity to participate in one way or another in project activities. Ideally, pupils should participate actively in all phases of the partnership, including the planning, organisation and evaluation of the activities. And in partnerships which focus on management questions or pedagogical themes, efforts should be made to enable pupils to get involved whenever the topic allows it.

It will be easier to give a sharp educational profile to the partnership, and to increase its visibility, if there is a team behind it, and a common understanding about the aims, benefits and added value for the whole school.

3.4. INVOLVEMENT OF LOCAL COMMUNITY AND OTHER POTENTIAL PLAYERS

The school is an important player in the community, because good quality education is vital for the future of a community. Transnational cooperation projects like the Comenius School Partnerships give schools an opportunity to establish new links with partners in the local community in ways that can develop cooperation in new fields of community life. To achieve this, the school can play an active role, take the initiative and convince possible partners about the benefits of cooperation. It would be useful to contact representatives of the local community – such as its education authority or board, and professional and other associations – that might be interested in becoming involved in the project or supporting it. Local media and other schools in your area may have an interest in the results of the Comenius School Partnership. The results will also enable parents, other schools, the local community in general and decision-makers in particular to see that the partnership offers tangible benefits.

Many schools have also collaborated with teacher-training institutions and universities in testing innovative teaching methods. In addition, the teachers involved have been offered in-service training. It would be very beneficial for schools to make use of all their contacts in the community. For example, before approaching a local enterprise for support, the school could find out if any pupils' parents work for that company. This could make the first contact much easier. The same applies to the presence of the head of the school at public events or occasions that might lead to furthering school contacts in the local community

CHECKLIST: COMMUNICATING WITH YOUR PARTNERS

The following pointers may help you through the first difficult phase, so that you can communicate in languages with which you might not feel entirely comfortable to start with:

- Make sure that your partners are aware of the level of competence which you can manage on a day-to-day basis in their language. That way, you can find an effective basis for communication between you. Remember that it is easier to read or listen to a foreign language than to write or speak it.
- There is no reason why a conversation should not be conducted in a different language in each direction. Remember too that the right vocabulary is more important for effective communication than impeccable grammar : you will be more appreciated for trying to make yourself understood in your partners' languages than for limiting yourself to just a few well-practised remarks!
- Try to develop a functional knowledge of the languages of your partners. There are many good tapes or computer-based products available that will quickly help you to acquire some basic skills, and your participation in a Comenius School Partnership will give you plenty of opportunity to practice, as well as encouragement as you improve!
- It is also possible for teachers involved in Comenius School Partnerships to apply for Comenius In-Service Training grants in order to attend a language course abroad and learn the language of a partner country.
- Involve a person who could help you in the early stages, e.g. parents, colleagues or local partners. Some pupils and their parents might have a bilingual background and would be happy to assist in communication with the partner schools.

3.5. COMMUNICATING WITH YOUR PARTNERS

3.5.1. Which language/s to use?

Promoting language learning in school education is one of the objectives of Comenius. In general, teachers and pupils participating in partnerships are happy to practice their foreign language skills. However, if the level in a foreign language is more modest, effective communication within the partnership may seem difficult. Therefore it is not uncommon that at the start participants in a partnership may be relieved when the most common language is chosen as the working language. However, later on their relief may turn into frustration at not being able to try out and improve their skills in other languages.

Therefore, it is good to keep in mind that Comenius School Partnerships provide you and your pupils with an opportunity to use and improve your existing language skills, and, what is more, learn new languages you might never have considered learning otherwise.



3.5.2. Which means of communication to use?

The telephone is a very direct and personal way of communicating, but it does have a number of disadvantages. Access to a telephone may often be a problem, and differences in time zones, individual timetables and patterns of the school day can make calling difficult. Another drawback is that later on there is no tangible trace of what was agreed upon during telephone conversations. You should also remember that telephone conversations take place in real time – there is no time to look up words in a dictionary or to spend time making sense of a difficult passage. On the positive side, frequent connections and conversations will very quickly improve language skills!

Communicating in writing might be easier, at least initially. Letters, faxes and e-mail provide a good opportunity for being immediate and as personal as you wish. They have the added advantage of providing a tangible, lasting copy, and this in turn allows participants the leisure to work out what is being said and how to reply. Most schools have an internet connection or will be able to find some way of gaining access to one that can be used to send and receive messages. You might also think about using internet-based communication platforms, video conferences or even chats for communication and cooperation. For example the eTwinning platform could be used as an additional tool to support cooperation.

When you are addressing the issue of communication in connection with new technologies, you need to be aware of the varying degrees of familiarity with these media within participating schools. It is important that the related issue of accessibility and training needs are addressed in this context.

CHECKLIST: INFORMATION AND COMMUNICATION TECHNOLOGY IN A PROJECT

ICT has proved particularly suitable for project work because:

- it gives an opportunity to cooperate with partners in distant countries and it makes it simpler, faster, cheaper and more fun,
- it motivates pupils and encourages them to interact with pupils in partner schools and to exchange ideas and share knowledge with them,
- it encourages pupils to work independently,
- it increases linguistic and cultural awareness and provides the possibility to use foreign languages in an authentic setting,
- it makes the acquisition of knowledge more authentic,
- it gives access to a wide range of up-to-date sources of information which can be efficiently collected and compared,
- it provides new learning opportunities, particularly in the field of distance learning,
- it makes it easier for disabled persons to become involved,
- it enables the school to become more visible – the school's website will give parents and other interested parties information on what is happening within the school.

CHECKLIST: MONITORING PROGRESS SELF-EVALUATION

You and your partners should reflect on the following questions during and after the project:

- Have the plans been followed, and if not, why not?
- Are the goals appropriate?
- Should the partnership project be modified?
- What are the benefits of a given activity for the pupils?
- How did the pupils complete the tasks set for them?
- What skills are being/have been developed?
- Is the project helping to raise achievement levels?
- Are the means of communication used appropriate and efficient?
- Are the teachers working together?
- Does the project have an impact on the curriculum?
- Are parents/representatives of local community/other educational establishments/other relevant interested parties involved?
- Has there been an increase in pupils' and teachers' skills in foreign languages, and their motivation to learn them?
- Is there a greater awareness of the European dimension in education and of different cultures?
- Was the planned end-product created? Have the end result been achieved?

3.6. INFORMATION AND COMMUNICATION TECHNOLOGY IN A PROJECT

Information and Communication Technology (ICT) plays an increasingly important role in transnational projects. The role of ICT in a Comenius School Partnership is mainly to help learning and teaching. But it is also extremely useful for efficient and rapid communication.

When using ICT in your School Partnership, try to build on what you know. Start with those techniques which are familiar to you and exchange experiences among the partners. Ensure also that you have technical support in case the technology breaks down.

eTwinning offers a safe Internet platform with all the standard tools for communicating and sharing among schools and offers many opportunities to progress in the efficient use of ICT for pedagogical collaboration. You may consider registering your partnership for eTwinning in order to take advantage of all these tools and services.

The project “Comenius & Technology (CAT)”, implemented by several National Agencies in 2004, selected best practice examples and developed guidelines on the use of ICT in Comenius School Partnerships. The results of this project are available on <http://www.leargas.ie/cat>.

The **eTwinning** portal also offers a wealth of advice to teachers who want to use ICT tools in the projects. Please consult www.eTwinning.net

3.7. MONITORING PROGRESS – SELF-EVALUATION

Monitoring and evaluation are crucial for the success of a project. It is important to continuously monitor the school partnership in order to keep it on track and improve your performance. It allows you to adapt the partnership's objectives and activities to new or changing needs and to ensure that the partnership gives maximum added value to the schools directly involved and to other potential beneficiaries.

CHECKLIST: RESULTS AND THEIR DISSEMINATION

You are advised to share your experiences and the results of the project as widely as possible, in order to:

- make pupils and staff aware of what a good job they have done,
- make all interested parties and a wider public aware of the work the school has accomplished,
- influence decision-makers to support European cooperation projects in schools,
- generate interest in transnational cooperation,
- generate interest in language learning,
- raise awareness of European cultural diversity – and similarity,
- raise awareness of the European dimension in education.

M-TOOL

How do you communicate among partners?
How is the partnership project included in the institutions work plan?
How many persons are presently involved?

The M-tool is a tool for monitoring and self-evaluation of Comenius School Partnerships, from the initial phase of the partnership project to the end. M-Tool provides you with a list of questions, which will help you to find out if the partnership project is progressing according to the initial plan. It also helps you to identify deviations which you need to address so that you can attain your objectives and fulfil the tasks set in the original plan. You can easily go through the questions every now and then, discuss them with your partners at a project meeting, and improve your project implementation when necessary.

The tool covers the entire life cycle of your partnership project: communication, local activities, mobilities, institutional involvement, community involvement, outcomes and results, evaluation, dissemination and exploitation of results. The tool was developed by a consortium of National Agencies from Portugal, Italy, Finland, Romania, Poland and Turkey. It is available at the following website: <http://www.proalv.pt/mttools/index.htm>

3.8. RESULTS AND THEIR DISSEMINATION

Dissemination means the sharing of your experiences and the results of your project.

Different target groups may have an interest in the end-product of your School Partnership. These include local and regional authorities and businesses (especially if they have supported your School Partnership), neighbouring schools, parents, teacher-training institutions, and universities. From the outset, you and your partners should outline plans for how, when and where to reach the target groups of your School Partnership. Be imaginative, because there are many possibilities. The following suggestions might be useful: organise small exhibitions in your school or in other public places; develop a school newspaper, or provide articles for one that exists already; report on the partnership in school and council reports; publish articles in the school's yearbook; use the school website; distribute information at parents' evenings and open days, and at local, regional and national conferences; write articles for academic and professional journals; inform local, regional and national media; and use other meetings, seminars and networks to provide information about your activities.



3.9. PUPIL EXCHANGES IN BILATERAL SCHOOL PARTNERSHIPS

Pupil exchanges play an essential role in Bilateral Comenius School Partnerships and can also be organised in a Multilateral Comenius School Partnership. There are many purposes to an exchange. The most obvious is to increase the motivation, capacity and confidence of pupils to communicate in other European languages. The exchange experience will certainly give the participants the opportunity to use the foreign language in an authentic setting; but the intercultural experience, through living in another country, preferably within the domestic culture of a family, is also significant for the “visiting” exchange pupils. The pupils will also have the opportunity to work intensively together on the common project during exchanges.

In bilateral partnerships, the exchanges normally consist of two periods of a minimum of ten days each (including travel) spent by pupils aged 12 or older in the locality of their partner institution. Whenever possible, the pupils should stay in each others’ families. There are many advantages to this: it is the best opportunity to practise language skills; the pupils will have a stimulating first-hand experience of another culture; and it encourages the development of their social skills. However, it is sometimes impossible for a family to host a foreign pupil, and you may need to resort to other solutions such as a youth hostel or student accommodation – although this will limit the linguistic and cultural experience.

Accompanying staff should preferably also be accommodated in the homes of their counterparts. Besides being more interesting for them, it is a sign for the pupils that “Our teachers are in the same situation, so we are all in it together”. It is very important that both participating schools have a clear understanding and clear agreements about all aspects of the exchange. The following are some ideas that relate to the different phases of a language-focused bilateral Comenius School Partnership.

Before the exchange

The pre-exchange period is an important time to lay the foundations for a well-planned, smooth exchange experience. At an early stage it is important to: organise a project meeting with your partner to prepare the exchange; take care of travel arrangements; organise and follow language preparation; and establish contact between pupils participating in the exchange.

Other matters to organise are to develop a programme for the exchange, to finalise preparatory tasks for the common project work during the exchange, to choose the accompanying staff and finally to match the participating pupils. Matching the pupils is particularly important if project work will be carried out in pairs – you can do this on the basis of the wishes of the pupils and/or by using matching forms.

The pre-exchange period is also a good time to raise additional funds for the project. It is especially relevant if the project’s topic relates to a local/regional/national company that may be interested in the outcome of the project. For instance, a project that aims to create a marketing strategy for a local product has good chances of being supported by the company producing the product.

CHECKLIST: PUPIL EXCHANGES IN BILATERAL SCHOOL PARTNERSHIPS

The programme of the exchange should include:

- ample time for joint work on the project,
- a daily period when pupils are alone with their accompanying teachers to discuss social and project matters,
- extra language classes if necessary,
- visits linked to the project objectives,
- leisure and free time.

During the exchange it is important to involve:

- staff and pupils of the host school who are not directly concerned by the exchange,
- parents, whether they host exchange pupils or not, as well as
- members of the local community such as local businesses, cultural associations, etc.

In the period after the exchanges it is important to:

- complete the end-product,
- evaluate the project (and write the final report required by the National Agency),
- disseminate the results of the project.

The end-product is the visible result of the work by pupils in partner institutions using the partner languages as much as possible and useful. The end-product:

- represents languages used in the partnership,
- provides an objective for the partnership,
- provides an opportunity to show the pupils' competence in the foreign language,
- enables pupils to see and enjoy what they have achieved,
- enables teachers, parents and other interested parties to see what the pupils have achieved,
- illustrates cooperation between pupils of two different countries.

During the exchange

During the exchange the pupils of both schools, divided into small groups or pairs, will collaborate on tasks already planned within their project according to the pupils' individual work plans. In the first part of the exchange pupils continue the work started in the pre-exchange period and plan the work to be done in the second part (the return visit). In the second part of the exchange they complete the end-product – or at least finalise the plans for its production.

It is essential that accompanying teachers monitor the work and the use of the foreign language by their pupils and, where necessary, support and encourage those pupils lacking in confidence. The accompanying staff should hold daily evaluation sessions with their counterparts to make sure that everything is running smoothly and to solve any problems. Together with the pupils' logbooks and diaries of the exchange, the results of these evaluation meetings are an important source when writing the final report of the project.

Remember to keep these groups regularly informed about the development of the school partnership. Make clear that the project and the exchange is a valuable cultural experience for all. Invite them to help with some of the leisure activities.

CHECKLIST: SAFE AND SMOOTH MOBILITY

When planning the exchange/project meeting abroad, it is useful to:

- make checklists for all parties involved, i.e. for the pupils travelling abroad, their parents, the head teacher and the responsible group leader and other accompanying adults,
- draw up a code of conduct between the child/children or young person(s) and the school/responsible teacher/accompanying adult(s),
- draft a parental/guardian consent form.

You could also reflect on the following issues:

- a realistic assessment of potential difficulties,
- sensitive supervision,
- promotion of safety skills and strategies for children and young people, possibly together with the police, youth workers or other relevant bodies,
- laws relating to children and young people, including child protection, in the home country and the country to be visited,
- the necessary documentation for travel abroad, including travel insurance and some basic background information about the area to be visited,
- comprehensive information to the parents/guardians, to the school administration and to colleagues, about the itinerary, programme, addresses and emergency contact numbers,
- procedures for possible emergencies in the country to be visited.

3.10. SAFE AND SMOOTH MOBILITY

Most Comenius School Partnerships allow pupils to participate in project meetings or pupil exchanges abroad. When you are planning a mobility activity involving pupils, it is good to remember that any visit abroad involves an element of risk, such as illness, accident, theft or abuse – although the many benefits far outweigh the risks. Careful planning with the teachers and the pupils concerned, their parents, the school management and administration and other interested parties will help to clearly define the responsibilities of the different parties and to reduce the risks. Careful planning will also enable pupils with special educational needs, and who might be more vulnerable, to fully benefit from the experience of travelling and staying abroad. Being involved in the planning will also create a sense of ownership which will make it easier to accept and understand jointly agreed rules and codes of conduct and to respect them during the stay abroad.



3.11. SUSTAINABILITY

Entering into a Comenius School Partnership also means being open to new ideas, encountering new experiences and meeting new friends and colleagues in Europe. You might not want to lose that, after the funding for your Comenius School Partnership has ended. You may wish to maintain your work and your cooperation with other schools in Europe. How can you achieve sustainability for your Partnership and how can you pursue international activities at your school – probably without the help of new funding?

There are basically two ways of looking at sustainability:

- Consolidation and development: how to pursue and further develop the good work at your school and/or in your community
- Continuity: how to continue the collaboration with your partner schools on a European level

Already during the funding period, you should start planning for the future of the partnership. You will have to clarify what will be possible in future, in the light of resources and the interests of your partner schools. Actions you might consider include activities that could provide additional funding, and ways of minimising costs. You should think of ways to integrate best practices developed during the Comenius School Partnership in the daily work of your institutions, and to pass them on to new colleagues. You should also try to find feasible ways of staying in touch with your partner schools (virtual meetings, eTwinning, joint ventures, exchange programmes, etc).



QUALITY AND SUSTAINABILITY (QAS)

QAS is a joint project of National Agencies in Sweden, the Czech Republic, France, and the UK. The project developed tools for the monitoring of partnership projects and for ensuring their quality and sustainability. Their web site provides a set of possible actions that partnerships can take to prepare for sustainability, listed in a document called “Facing Sustainability”. For partnerships which are about to end, the “Sustainability Kit” on the same web site also contains a wide selection of ideas on how to pursue activities. <http://qas.programkontoret.se>

3.12. HOSTING A COMENIUS ASSISTANT

Your school may decide to apply for a Comenius Assistant. Comenius Assistants are future teachers who receive a grant to spend 3-10 months at a host school abroad. They usually assist in classroom or project-type of work, gain early teaching experience, and learn about the school system in their host country. Such assistants may be assigned to any school eligible under Comenius (see Guidelines for Applicants for more details).

A Comenius Assistant may help prepare and implement the partnership's activities between your school and schools from her/his country. This is a valuable opportunity. Previous projects have shown that an assistant can offer significant help and input in formulating and organising a partnership. Furthermore, an assistant can provide support in planning and realising the project.

If your school wishes to host a Comenius Assistant, you will need to submit an application to your National Agency. The application deadline is indicated in the Call for Proposals. The application form is available from your National Agency. The National Agency will try to match your school's requirements with the wishes of the future teachers applying for such a grant. They can also provide you with further information on this action and give hints on how best to plan this activity.

A host school must designate a teacher to supervise the assistant, look after his or her welfare, monitor the progress of the assistantship, and act as contact person throughout. The school should also try and help the assistant to find accommodation. Assistants receive a grant to help cover mobility costs, which includes travel and a monthly contribution towards subsistence. The host school does not receive any financial support to organise the assistantship, as it will benefit from the presence and the work of the assistant.





4. POSSIBLE PROBLEMS AND HOW TO AVOID THEM

In a school partnership involving several partners from different schools and different countries, unexpected problems may arise. Being aware of the possible problems helps you to plan and carry out your project in a more realistic and practical manner.

Withdrawal of a partner or a person

Even if the minimum requirement in multilateral School Partnerships is three partners, it is wiser to start with at least four partner schools. If one of the partners has to withdraw, the project will still be able to continue. It is also essential to actively involve several people from each participating school. If one of them has to withdraw, there will be others who are familiar with the activities and can continue the work.

Unclear division of tasks

The tasks of the participating schools should be clearly defined in advance. Each participating school should be aware of its role and the concrete tasks that it is expected to carry out. It is advisable to set out the tasks in writing. Comenius School Partnerships demand extra work from all the participants – make sure that you and your partners are aware of this before committing yourselves to it!

Lack of time, lack of resources

Partnerships may be tempted to set goals that are too ambitious to attain in two years. When planning a school partnership, it is better to formulate concrete, attainable goals to which all the participating schools can commit. However, it is also wise to leave some flexibility in the work plan so that it can be modified if necessary.

It is good to keep in mind that schools can have differing resources and that they cannot always invest equal amounts of time and money in the Comenius School Partnership. The level of technical equipment in a school can also impact on cooperation. For instance, not all schools have the same possibilities to use ICT in communicating with their partners, and this can significantly influence schedules.

Cultural differences

When working with people from different countries and different cultures it is useful to keep in mind the different backgrounds of your partners. Working cultures differ, and so do school environments, rules and practices. In addition, teachers and pupils may have different rights and obligations from those in your country. So keep an open mind and talk openly with your partners about the differences and any possible problems. And remember that learning about different cultures and ways of doing things is an essential part of your partnership!



Language and communication problems

It is important to ensure from the outset that you and your partners have at least one working language in common. Interpretation is not recommended because it slows down work, is not always available, and does not allow the same degree of personal contact. Regular communication between the partners – and within each participating school – is a condition for the success of a project. Face-to-face meetings cannot be organised often, so it is important to use efficient means of communication.

It may be useful to agree on fixed days for communication. A simple but efficient rule is always to confirm reception of e-mails and faxes so that the sender knows the message has been received. Differences in the level of technical equipment in each of the partner institutions may sometimes be a problem. Even if e-mail is the fastest and easiest means of communication, you need to find other solutions if one of the partners has no access to it.

Differences in the school year

The school year starts and ends at different times in different European countries, and holiday periods vary considerably. The differences need to be taken into account when fixing the work plan for the project. Remember also that the curriculum is more flexible in some partner schools than in others, so plan your work accordingly.

Lack of support from your own school

A Comenius School Partnership should involve the whole school, not just a contact person and her/his pupils. When taking the initiative to take part in a partnership, make sure that you have the support of the head of your school and of the other teachers, even those not directly involved in the project. It is also important to keep everybody informed of the progress of the project and of the results achieved.

Unexpected problems

If you encounter unexpected difficulties or problems, you may contact your National Agency for advice.



5. CONCLUSION

This handbook is intended to present the information you need to help you decide if you want to embark upon a Comenius School Partnership. It attempts to provide a realistic evaluation of the time and work entailed, of the potential difficulties, and of the benefits and rewards enjoyed by all those involved in a Comenius School Partnership.

The handbook offers advice on the stages of launching and carrying out a Comenius School Partnership: on how to initiate, organise and structure a partnership; technical advice on applications and grants; details on arranging safe and successful transnational mobility activities; pointers on how to involve and recruit the help of the entire school and local community, and parents; how to communicate, using modern information and communication technologies; examples of projects that inspire and spark the imagination; and various checklists, reminders, and tips.

The school is the “greenhouse” for shaping the character, values, skills, talents and actions of successive generations of world citizens. In this respect, the school is a world in itself. Comenius, the Czech pedagogue from the 17th century who lends his name to this EU activity, held the view that “schools must open themselves to the outside world”. In the light of this aim, we hope that Comenius School Partnerships will help you along the way.





ANNEX

Please find below some links to documents and websites which provide additional information on Comenius School Partnerships.

LIFELONG LEARNING PROGRAMME - IMPACT STUDIES

http://ec.europa.eu/education/programmes/llp/impact_en.html

REPORTS AND STUDIES

published by the European Commission, Directorate-General Education and Culture

http://ec.europa.eu/education/doc/reports/index_en.html

EUROPEAN SCHOOLNET

the gateway to education in Europe with possibilities for cooperation and communication between schools

<http://www.eun.org/portal/index.htm>

M-TOOL

A common monitoring tool to be used by National Agencies during visits to Partnerships

<http://www.proalv.pt/mtools/index.htm>

QAS PROJECT

Quality and Sustainability in Comenius and Grundtvig Partnerships

http://www.programkontoret.se/Default____5836.aspx

CAT PROJECT

Comenius and Technology: How ICT can be used in Comenius School Partnerships

<http://www.leargas.ie/cat/>

PRO-TEACHERS

How Comenius School Partnerships influence the professional development of teachers

<http://www.saaic.sk/proteachers/>

GRUNDTVIG NAVIGATOR

Handbook for adult education institutions starting a European partnership or being involved in one

http://www.europeesplatform.nl/index.php?var_content=content&contentid=140

EUROPEAN QUALITY CHARTER FOR MOBILITY

A reference document for stays abroad

<http://www.europa.eu/scadplus/leg/en/cha/c11085.htm>

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