



CONNECT

KNOWLEDGE ALLIANCE
FOR AUDIENCE DEVELOPMENT

WP8 – VALIDATION FINAL RECOMMENDATIONS



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Recommendations on the validation of non-formal university programmes

The present document lists the recommendations carried out within the validation framework of CONNECT, a Knowledge Alliance Erasmus+ project (2017-2019). The validation activities are strictly related to its main output, the Twin-Track Programme (TTP) that was designed and implemented in 5 countries of the Consortium: Spain, Denmark, Italy, Poland and the United Kingdom.

The TTP was a key tool for achieving the Connect project aims that were:

- (A) Bridging the gap between teaching in the academic/higher education world and Continuous Professional development in the cultural sector for the promotion of best practices and a systemic growth of audience development (AD);
- (B) Defining a new “twin-track” programme in AD with a Mentoring and Coaching Scheme; and
- (C) Creating a mutually supportive network and learning community of academics, practitioners and students in the arts management field focused on the audience engagement priorities that will have the European dimension.

The TTP was a programme comprised of multidisciplinary training modules that mixed formal and informal learning methodologies. Parallel sessions using practice-based learning activities, were run to introduce AD theory, practice and philosophy, to transfer management and strategic skills, and to develop entrepreneurial skills through ‘action research’ projects designed and delivered by students and practitioners working together in couples and supported by a mentoring scheme. The TTP design was based on the research initiatives carried out by the Consortium during WP2, including methodologies, actions and the main crosscutting results, with a view to designing an up-to-date, context-responsive training programme.

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The final recommendations on the validation of non-formal university programmes, related to accreditation and certification is based on the experience reflected through the workshop activity with partners: universities, training and expert organisations involved in the delivery of TTP educational formats in 5 Connect partnership countries: Spain, Denmark, Italy, Poland and the UK. It is based on the assessment of the deliveries provided by the Connect participants: students and practitioners involved in the different TTP formats. Special attention is given to the type of guidelines that might be useful for universities collaborating with business and creative enterprises as well as other arts and culture organisations and independent bodies from the cultural sector.

First, the consortium delivers **10 recommendations related to validation and general teaching** in both curricular, academic, university-based context and the continuous professional learning context related to non-university teaching and training organisations.

1. The Twin-Track Programme (TTP) can be recommended as an **educational format for the purpose of Audience Engagement rationales that is adjustable to different national educational contexts in Europe. On the one hand, the 7 module format including action research as a key component, is well adaptable to different national systems.** On the other hand, its tools require good ‘translation’ from the model version – as provided in syllabuses and templates - to the peculiarities of every national context or variations of study programmes. Any application of that model should consider all requirements and standards of the delivery of courses for professionals in that country.

2. The TTP is a **very practical proposal for learning formats that is feasible within the European Qualification Framework standards. It is verified as a possible and successful learning format to be delivered both by universities and training organisations that are not part of the higher education institutions systems.** The TTP was successfully tested as a format that was properly confirmed by authorised bodies that are universities in Spain, Poland, Denmark and the UK. **Every single case took a different form depending on the organisational and national context and formal standards chosen for accomplishment of the accreditation goal.** The case of Italy is not less successful however, as it was done as a certified programme by the partnership of the training and expert organisations, independently from the higher education institutions system.

3. There is a recommended **set of methods and tools included in the pack of 7 modules of the Connect TTP that not only supports well-defined competencies advancement for individuals - current and future professionals, but at the same time has an option of delivering tangible documentation that makes visible the individual participants’ experiences** achieved through their participation in the programme. TTP formats also provide a **good frame for properly formatted and diverse assessment tools tested positively in all countries of the European consortium. This was compatible with the certification** that was completed in all countries that applied the TTP format as part of the Connect Project.

4. The TTP is a recommended **solution of certified education that is at the same time a real connection to a work-based setting.** This was confirmed through the assessment as a

helpful example of the **bridge between teaching in the academic/higher education world and continuous professional development in the cultural sector. It worked especially well for the promotion of best practices and a systemic growth of audience development issues in and for cultural sector organisations.** It was not only the use of action research as a basis for the work, but also the development of prototypes, learning through problem solving and providing enriched placement schemes. The design-thinking concept worked well as a central theoretical basis for this. It linked to the problem-based learning aspects and the need for an audience focus. It provided as well, something new for practitioners, who were already familiar with audience development ideas. The twin track process was effective as a way for practitioners to benefit from student enthusiasm and knowledge and for the students to benefit from the opportunity to work in the organisations and gain from the experience of the practitioners.

5. It is recommended to **adjust the TTP mentoring scheme with care and consideration.** This component of the TTP when assessed and eventually certified appeared as the most difficult, especially in the cases of formal, standardised education formats of TTP application conducted within the university standards' contexts. **Mentors are not an everyday reality of academic teaching which produces stereotypical reactions and concerns. This requires additional organisational and training activities.**

6. Evaluation and validation of the TTP mentoring component shows that it was much **more effective, less problematic and less questioned when done in less formal conditions of programmes.** This was the case when: **a) it was moderated entirely by non-universities; b) it was moderated by universities with a long experience of coaching and mentoring and used to working with these tools in practice and partnership oriented educational formats and c) in universities with more creative industries and business oriented profiles and partnerships.**

7. The TTPs proved that **audience development - oriented training and teaching methods are effective only if they are based on multidisciplinary training modules that mix formal and informal learning methodologies.** This observation is even more evident when looking at the adaptation of university education and internships standards to meet the challenges, solutions, strategies and final implementations of the TTP students when focusing on cultural organisations and their demand for more audience-oriented change tools. **This format, with its variety of activities was successful in providing a platform for meeting colleagues and potential colleagues in the field and above all for having a forum for discussing issues important to the subject. The TTP developed an organisations-oriented learning project format, one that is unusual for university-based teaching.** The Connect TTP brought students and practitioners closer to the organisation's self-understanding in relation to strategic work focused on AD.

8. The TTP can be recommended as a good educational **format providing simultaneous, parallel or joint sessions using practice-based learning activities that matched students with professionals. This is something not much present in the existing curricula of universities.** The TTP (throughout the entire process or in its particular units) had both MA students and experienced employees of arts & culture organisations in the same classroom;

students learning through contact with experienced colleagues and practitioners learning through the fresh perspective of less experienced individuals who are nevertheless immersed in the young generation's issues and their responses. **Students also became temporary members of organisations as part of a partnership with the practitioner there. This is a challenge, as it is a process that has two streams and two levels of experience facilitated at the same time. It has its advantages and disadvantages, including during the early stage of the process, when some practitioners and students were not always comfortable with this matching or mixing of different communities. However, this was ultimately a highly appreciated and valued dimension of the TTP.** These combinations influenced positively the intense engagement, having enthusiasm combined with appropriate conduct and the social oriented commitment of all students in the initiation of new relations and partnerships.

9. One of the best elements of the TTPs applied through Connect was the **way in which the programme was interpreted in different countries. This included the experiment of accredited and not accredited versions, universities and non-universities and different geographical delivery (programmes taking place in two cities in a country for example).** As a pilot project, there were many unknowns, high ambitions and new elements to create. This led to some problems in the search to find the best way to do things. The consortium tried to resolve all problems by integrating different ideas and methods with shared goals, demonstrating the value of the diversity of international contexts.

10. The essential confirmed feature of all TTPs tested was the way that **they provided natural and comfortable conditions for the flourishing of a mutually supportive network and learning community of academics, practitioners and students in the arts management field focused on audience engagement with a strong European and international dimension.**

From this point on, there are more precise issues articulated by the consortium partners that can be seen as **more detailed recommendations and guidelines for reflection and change in practice-oriented teaching and training.**

11. If the TTP is offered in the original version as one programme for students and practitioners, and there is a need to keep ECTS as the granting element, the partnership should consist of a university organisation or have the university as an officially agreed partner that is eligible to provide the ECTS format. The Connect project proved that it is possible to teach students and practitioners together and that it is possible to be successful in delivering a 9-month long programme outside the higher education institutional framework. However, this cannot always be awarded with ECTS and EQF compatible accreditation without official agreement with universities. There is a question of how to provide that technically, keeping both the university qualification frame on one side and flexibility and attractiveness of the non-standard, non-formal spirit of the programme on the other. The enrolment to the university, that is usually necessary if one wants to have and use ECTS, is not always an option as a response to student and practitioner needs in taking part in the TTP on Audience Development.

12. For some participants, ECTS credits were not attractive practical awards, especially for practitioners who were no longer taking courses or had continued their education through the formal university system. Certificates and diplomas were the visible awards students and practitioner were asking for – according to the research done in the Connect Project. However, the ECTS dimension of the award is not necessary for practitioners and is only partly valuable for students. Students who need it are usually undergraduates or MA programme students who are at an early stage of their degree whilst the students who are at the beginning of their professional careers and have almost their existing MA studies, don't require the additional ECTS. There aren't many options to integrate the TTP programme as a module or course within the structure of existing MA programmes, although one partner in the Connect programme did integrate this successfully as an offer within the university programme. However, this was an exception.

13. If the ECTS credit numbers are mainly counted as corresponding only to hours – it is not enough, as it should also calculate the complexity of the task done by students and effects achieved through intense, non-replicable, tailored and originally created solutions.

14. In the case of the TTP providers who are not universities or for whom the partnership with the university is not an available, practical option – it is worth providing a tangible alternative of recognizable awards for graduating participants. Some of the Connect project partners provided a comparison of the certification system as offered for language courses, with well-defined levels of competencies and proficiency acquired through the course or programme (TOEFL, Cambridge Certificates, etc.). This could be extended to the international dimension, with the awarding of such activities that accompanied the TTP such as international mobilities and experiences. Learning through the mobility activities should be recognised accordingly. The only solution here apart from the ECTS is to operate with the granting of specific and generic competencies and skills that are well tagged or labelled: elementary level, intermediate level, proficiency levels achieved by the participant in a competency. As proved through one of the Connect TTPs that did not provide ECTS, the alternative solutions might have a good response from participants, who are not necessary looking for EQF standard tools.

15. Certification and accreditation of any kind is part of the price that people will be ready to pay for taking part in the TTP programme in future editions. This seems to be the necessary element of the programme's sustainability apart from the attractiveness of the TTP components themselves, and the overall quality of the programme, its reputation and applicability.

16. The formal university framework provides the option for recognizing ECTS, but it also has its limitations. The evaluation and validation processes of the Connect project showed how complex and time consuming were the arrangement and management activities processed around programmes and courses when they were provided through universities, which enrolled students and participants according to formal standards. They pushed the entire TTP and especially the action research and internship processes through the channels of university regulations and administrative necessities. On the one hand, this is the standard we are used to. On the other hand, this is more complicated than the programmes and courses that were offered by the non-universities, training and expert organisations, who were only cooperating with universities. For this reason, it is essential to choose the right formal format for that type of educational offer. The priority in this case is to provide the best flexibility and space for innovation, even if this is operated from inside the public university.

17. Some formats of TTP were well anchored and others were not adjusted to the types of programmes MA students are usually invited to join, when studying graduate programmes. The post-graduate training format was perceived by some of the younger students as something aimed at already employed people and professionals. This made it harder to explain that they were eligible to join the TTP in such a formal shape and with such a label in its name. One of the solutions tested through the TTP delivery by one of the Connect partners was by keeping it as a substantial extension of students' internships that were integrated within their postgraduate university studies. TTP became the new format of internship designed through the tools of Connect and one that was easier for students to understand.

18. The essential activity in the thresholds of the TTP delivery process should be the agreement of the programme moderators in the set of professional competencies that are to be achieved through the application of the TTP format, a frame indicating all specific and generic competences.

19. The action research process as the central activity of the latter part of the programme introduces several essential opportunities. The work in partnerships or small groups provides a rich learning opportunity if it is clear what they are expected to deliver. One student taking the problem from an audience perspective and another from the organisation perspective, sharing the same challenge and working on several solutions is a good example. This is a chance to have twofold perspectives, with the AD-related problem having answers provided from different sides. If the operator of the TTP decides on a public presentation of partnerships or groups involved in the programme, this introduces an effective opportunity to share, test and discuss the problems and practicality of designed solutions. This might be another learning experience. The action research process also may be more sustainable if it is organised through the rhythm of regular student meetings with their tutor or mentor. This could be a way to provide the continuity of the process and protect partnerships from going in non-effective directions. Tutor – student meetings provide an opportunity to support and verify whether TTP participants are on a suitable path of the action research, if they understand the process and keep a good workload balance.

20. One of the optional outcomes of the TTP students' work might be a final paper as proof of tangible, documented students' and practitioners' achievement. This might be not only an assessment tool but also a 'memory depository' for the whole process of TTP and the organisations involved. This solution was tested productively by the majority of TTP applications in the Connect consortium. In terms of validation, final papers give a solid basis of assessment in accordance with listed competencies. The final assignment content could document the process that students went through and provide a critical perspective of the entire effort of developing solutions in a particular field of AD. Final papers as final delivery are oriented so that the AD-related issue is problematised and contextualised. It can be a deeper, reflective elaboration of the action research process and effect. An alternative, minimised version might be a final learning log, documenting experience and learning; something that worked well in the Connect project.

21. Considering the analysis of the outcome of the accredited TTPs, there is a question of whether the mentoring process should be mandatory. A more optimal solution might be one based on the voluntary, elective, model in which the mentee selects the mentor. Other questions that the validation process highlighted were dilemmas related to the integration of the mentoring scheme in the TTP: if mentors should be paid or not; if the mentor should adopt a role closer to the coaching style (as happened in Italy or Spain) or rather more technical methods, closer to a consultant (as was the case in Denmark). A more demanding but attractive way to recruit mentors might be to engage them in long-term relationships within the programme. There is a question of recruiting top experts and the most experienced leaders – that would require a budget for fees. Another extension here is the use of the database of experts available for TTP participants, including the activation of international experts thanks to the Connect international community. An additional benefit for the TTP participants is to be able to enter the mentors' network as well as other experts and practitioners' networks that are created in the context of the programme.

22. The TTP provides much space for extension into digital formats. There might be inspirations from several accredited international study programmes that have interesting models that have a combination of online presence and attendance of some components in the course hub, such as seminars and tutorials. There are further components recommended as extensions of the TTP methods and tools: peer review group activity or blog writing exercises. One of the partners tested this within the existing TTP – and introduced it as one of the solutions – a blog page which students used to extend their reading. This might be the online place for sharing, with people volunteering their favourite case studies. In the current edition of the TTP, there was a limitation to extend it or use it properly, as the partners had no resources for project managers to moderate the process carefully and constantly.

23. The pace of the TTP in every country was evaluated as being fast, whilst at the same time packed with a rich spectrum of activities. This made it difficult to validate every activity, follow every methodical step and assess every applied teaching and learning solution. This enthusiasm and richness of options that needed to be tested, made the assessment of the TTP more difficult and complex. This is discussed in detail in the evaluation report.

24. The powerful tool that was easiest to validate was the action research project as this focused on a real challenge and the need to act and implement something that had an impact in the cultural organisations and the local communities around them. This was a tangible, transparent motivator and the source of commitment for students and practitioners within the programme. The

engagement was evident and the final successful certification proving participant proficiency in this field of experience was even more justified and self-explanatory.

25. The final validation and the confirmation provided with a final certificate to all participants, proved the input and qualifications achieved and strengthened the TTP in all countries involved. This certification confirmed the range of TTP students' and practitioners' competencies both to themselves and to the organisations involved. The organisations in charge of the TTP (universities, enterprises, foundations and associations) as well as the organisations impacted by the TTP (cultural organisations where the action research projects were implemented) and also the future workplaces of students to whom the certificate will be presented as proof of qualification, experience and candidates' reputations all benefit from a final certificate.

26. The TTP may be oriented to include key strategic considerations about project management and change communication within its process. Both parts appealed strongly to students and organisations, as the work with organisations' narratives and self-understanding gave rise to more fundamental discussions and reflections on AD status and function in the cultural institution, the society and in the university curriculum. This approach lies in a possible competence development and thus a definition of how AD is a real competence and professionalism.

27. The organisations that offer TTP and are not part of higher-education systems have much to offer in the sense of true values of non-formal education. They all provide wider access to professional networks of organisations and practitioners, the connection and bridge that is unavailable otherwise to universities. The TTP ran by educational, training organisations are thus extending the essence of the educational format's validation into the reality of labour and organisational practice in the cultural sector. This brings another, less institutionalised side of the educational process focused on the development of particular competences for the cultural sector.

CONNECT is a Knowledge Alliance for Audience Development that promotes innovative cooperation between universities, institutions and enterprises in the cultural sector across Europe, funded by European Programme Erasmus Plus – KA2 Knowledge Alliances. The Knowledge Alliance is composed by:

University of Deusto (Spain)



Asimétrica (Spain)



The Audience Agency (UK)



Goldsmiths, University of London (UK)



CKI (Denmark)



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