1 Background

1.1 The Conference and Contact Seminar in Barcelona, Spain was organised and delivered by partners in the Thematic Network, Comp@ct, with the specific aim of raising awareness of the role of ICT in school education and creating project proposals for Comenius 1. 50 participants attended the Contact Seminar, a further 15 were present at the Conference, and they were joined by 14 of the Comp@ct partners. In total, 14 countries were represented and several national agencies were also present.

1.2 This report was written around key areas and indicators selected from the Guidelines for Evaluating Your European project using evidence from:
- two evaluations by participants during the event
- an evaluation workshop on the final day
- informal feedback during the whole event

2 Quality of the Transnational Element

2.1 A real strength of the event was the involvement of participants from 14 different countries. This was appreciated in particular by those attending the contact seminar, and they felt they had learned a great deal about the various countries and their different education systems. The Marketplace and Welcome Dinner on the first evening were very much enjoyed and provided a useful opportunity for delegates to get to know each other and their countries in a relaxed and informal atmosphere.

2.2 The host country, Spain, took on board the organisation of the conference and contact seminar, and those contributions from the host country regarding its work with ICT were very much enjoyed, particularly the talk on the final day by the Deputy Director of the IT Unit in Barcelona and the
workshop on Streaming and Broadcasting earlier in the programme. These acted as a stimulus for delegates to discuss their own experiences of using ICT.

2.3 This contact seminar, like other events of this kind, provided a very useful context for the development of positive attitudes towards Europe. The participants clearly welcomed the opportunity to work with teachers from other countries and it proved surprisingly easy for them to find partners and begin to develop their project ideas.

2.4 The working language for the seminar was English, and the great majority of the participants had very high skills in this. Very few language difficulties were encountered during the event.

3 Structure, content and delivery

3.1 The evaluation exercise on the final day indicated that, while participants were happy with some of the elements of the programme, those who were attending the contact seminar felt that not enough time had been set aside in the programme for them to develop their projects with their prospective partners. It would have been helpful to have included a session on the first day by a representative from a national agency giving an overview of the Socrates programme and practical advice and information about Comenius 1. A lunchtime session was organised on the second day, but it would have been preferable to have had this as a formal session on the programme.

3.2 There is always a dilemma when a thematic conference and a contact seminar are running in parallel to ensure that the programme meets the needs of both target groups. Those attending the conference were very happy with the content of the various sessions offered and with the opportunity to think about future uses of ICT when streaming technologies and broadband access are more prevalent. Contact seminar delegates, however, felt that some of the content was not practical enough for their needs and would have welcomed alternative sessions in a parallel programme - or simply more time to develop their project ideas under the guidance of a national agency representative or other teachers who had already participated in Comenius 1. They also felt that they would have liked more time to become familiar with the use of the e-journal in a hands-on session.

3.3 In terms of the allocation of time for the various elements of the programme, it was felt that shorter sessions would have been better. Although the Spanish organiser was good at intervening if it seemed likely that there would be a time slippage, nonetheless, some sessions (the presentation of existing Comenius 1 projects and the results of the ICT Survey) were generally felt to have been too long. Similarly, the rather
detailed presentation about the Comp@ct network was considered to have been largely irrelevant for most participants, and there was a view that this information could have been provided in a hand-out.

4 Materials, resources, equipment

4.1 The venue for the event, the office of the Catalan Ministry of Education in Barcelona, provided excellent, well-equipped facilities in a pleasant location. Participants very much appreciated having access to computer rooms where they could work, check emails etc. when they had a free moment. It was important, because of the ICT content of the event, to have up-to-date equipment and, for most participants, the opportunity to take part in a live link with students in Tallinn, was a highlight of the event.

4.2 Some delegates commented that they would have liked to have been provided with the conference packs on arrival at their hotel, and they were surprised that a list of participants, with contact details, was not included in the pack.

5 Quality of the domestic arrangements

5.1 In advance of the seminar, some practical information about travel and other arrangements was provided to participants by the Spanish partner. There was, however, much criticism that the hotels were so far away from the Ministry of Education and that transport was not especially arranged nor included in the overall fee.

5.2 Participants enjoyed the evening meals which took place in Catalan restaurants, however the lunches at the Ministry of Education (apart from the buffet on the last day) were felt to be less successful. There was general agreement that lunch breaks should have been shorter to allow for an earlier close at the end of the day. As it was, because of the distance and the time needed to return to the hotels, there was very little free time before dinner. The guided tour of Barcelona by bus on the final afternoon, however, was hugely successful and went a long way to redressing the earlier complaint that there was no time for sightseeing.
6 Key strengths

6.1 In conclusion, it was clear that the event had been generally successful with 6 prospective Comenius 1 projects arising from the contact seminar:

- From slow way of life to fast way of life: a project using the e-journal and involving 15-16 year old pupils in DE/NO/RO
- Opening the door to Europe: primary pupils in ES/UK/RO/IT would use ICT to share information about the culture of Europe
- EUMAG: an electronic magazine for the 3rd millennium involving primary pupils in UK/DE/IT/ES
- BND (Barcelona, Nottingham, Derry): a project about culture for primary pupils involving the use of video-conferencing
- PRIDE (Promoting Regional Identity through Digital Exchange): a secondary school project involving UK/DE/EST/LT and possibly ES/FR/NL promoting the use of language to develop mutual understanding
- A Comenius 1.3 school development project allowing teachers in UK/RO/LUX/DE/AT to prepare materials to assist in deliver ICT skills

As a Next Step, it was proposed that all schools should present themselves using the e-journal and that a dedicated time for online discussion should be organised.

6.2 The evaluation activities identified the following key strengths:

- excellent opportunity to meet and work with people from different countries
- the session on the last day by the Deputy Director of the IT Unit ("he gave us a realistic and visionary outlook on future work" … "it will be our future")
- e-journal is a useful tool ("we liked it so much we are going to use it")
- the session on Communication Tools ("the video-conference was excellent and gave us something to aim for")
- the Streaming and Broadcasting sessions were of especial interest to those attending the thematic conference ("but not enough time")
- opportunities to create collaboration and partnerships
- the excellent sightseeing tour
- nice intervention by the Spanish host and the Master of Ceremonies (the Comp@ct partner from NL)
- the evaluation feedback each morning ("but we were too tired on the first day to concentrate on the presentation!")
• "very good technical equipment and it was very helpful that there were always 2 persons to take care of the equipment"

7 Areas for improvement

7.1 Areas for improvement were:
• overly long speeches which were on too high a level for most teachers at the contact seminar
• more interactive sessions needed
• the practical arrangements could sometimes have been clearer
• results of ICT Survey ("results were not really representative")
• we were given too much irrelevant information about Comp@ct and the other networks ("they were just disseminating information but not stable, reliable, co-ordinated - should have been fewer projects with more time to show all aspects")
• some of the presentations of existing Comenius 1 projects could have been better ("maybe they should have been given a few questions to focus on")
• the interruption of the session on the LRC project could have been handled better
• not enough time to meet with partners
• the chronology of events ("a presentation of Comenius should have been at the beginning")
• it would have been useful to have had a practical session on how to fill in the Comenius application form
• more space to display school information for the duration of the event
• more countries and national agencies represented
• too far from hotel to the Ministry of Education
• not enough time to experience the culture of Barcelona
• "it is not a good idea to mix a conference and a contact seminar!"
• good access to materials and equipment, but not enough time to use them!
• "we didn't get a list of participants with their contact details"
• "too much fish!!"

7.2 Feedback from participants showed that they had gained a great deal of knowledge:
"I learned"
• "how similar other teachers are to us"
• how different some school systems are
• information about Comenius projects in practice ("but not enough!"
• how to use e-journal
• vision for ICT in the future
• many facts about Spain, in particular about Catalan language etc
• "how accessible Europe is to us all"
• how ICT is a valuable tool for teaching/learning and sharing
• "we got to know new possibilities of communication (e-journal, video-
  conference, Vigo, Skype)
• the importance of evaluation
• "we all got a push of new information and motivation to be prepared and
  able for changes"
• "Catalans prepare the fish with honey!"

8 Conclusion

8.1 In general, this was a successful event. Feedback was, on the whole,
positive, though the difficulty of running a contact seminar and a thematic
conference in parallel was highlighted. With the majority of participants
coming to Barcelona for the contact seminar rather than the thematic
conference, it would have been helpful to have prioritised their needs and
offered more practical advice and opportunities for developing projects.
Nonetheless, prospective projects were created and participants agreed
that they now had a greater knowledge of the role of ICT in Comenius
projects and a better vision of ICT in education in the future.

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