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**Producing Open Online Learning Systems-3**

**EXTERNAL EVALUATION**

**YEAR 2 QUALITY REPORT**

August 2015

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# Table of contents

**Introduction page 3**

**1. The work programme / milestone approach to recording project progress page 7**

**WP1 Project Management page 7**

**WP2 Quality Management page 8**

**WP3 Communication Platform and WP5 Dissemination page 11**

**WP4 Exploitation and impact page 13**

**WP6 Adaptation and translation of the POOLS course guide and**

**WP7 Adaptation and translation of the POOLS course book page 14**

**WP8 Digital video/audio source materials and WP10 Instructional DVDs page 15**

**2. The responses the project makes to feedback page 17**

**3. Conclusions and recommendations page 21**

# Introduction

**GLPM**

GLPM is a consortium of experts working in the field of transnational cooperation in projects in education and training. It was established by Gareth Long when he left his position as Minerva Project Officer at the Socrates Leonardo and Youth Technical Assistance Office in Brussels at the end of 2005. In the period since, he and his colleagues have evaluated 40+ projects from the Lifelong Learning Programme and other initiatives with EU funding. GLPM adopts an innovative approach to the evaluation work undertaken in that it covers all areas of project work. This includes, but is not limited to, the outcomes achieved, the progress toward the outcomes, the transnational dynamics of that progress, the consistency of the project in addressing its initial aims, the extent and consistency of the involvement of the target group in ongoing project work, the mechanisms built-in to ensure sustainability, steps taken to embed innovative outcomes into mainstream provision, consideration of, and complementarity with, the state of the art, and instances of added value.

For the POOLS-3 project, Gareth Long is the lead evaluator supported by Lydia Pavlopoulou. Gareth has worked in the Technical Assistance Office in Brussels as Project Officer for the Socrates Minerva action and now specialises in evaluation work as well as being an assessor for the EACEA for its Erasmus+, e-Learning, Minerva, Grundtvig, KA1, KA3, Erasmus, Erasmus Mundus, Transfer of Innovation, ECET and Tempus actions.  He was asked by the Commission to present an expert view of the assessment of projects at the Erasmus co-ordinators’ meeting in Brussels in 2010 and was invited as an expert to shortlist best practice projects in the field of social inclusion. In 2013 he prepared and submitted a successful tender for a three-year evaluation contract with EUN Schoolnet for external evaluation of projects.

Lydia Pavlopoulou has 12 years’ experience in providing assistance and consultancy in European projects. From 2001-2004, she worked in the TAO as a GRUNDTVIG officer. Since then she has been an expert assessor of Projects for the EACEA, mainly in the field of Languages and Adult Education. She is a German teacher and has a University degree with a Masters in European Studies. She has coordinated YOUTH programmes in the field of environmental protection and has carried out numerous external evaluations of projects with Gareth. In addition to Greek and German, Lydia is fluent in English and Italian. Lydia has recently established her own German Language School specialising in course for adults for language learning for specific purposes: DFE – Deutsch für Erwachsene.

The external evaluation strategy was presented in detail in the initial strategy document and report submitted in December 2013 and re-visited in the end of year one quality report in September 2014 and so it is not repeated here; however it is important to emphasise that the external evaluation outcomes are best regarded as related outputs as they re-visit aspects previously highlighted as well as identifying new achievements or challenges as the POOLS-3 project progresses. This report (August 2015) is the third main evaluation output in line with the contract between GLPM and Sabhal Mòr Ostaig (SMO – the project co-coordinator) and is the end of year two quality report. It was initially scheduled for the end of June 2015, but after discussion with SMO, it was agreed that it would be postponed slightly in order to serve partially as a preparation for the final report document in order to be available for the partners to consider during the final project meeting in Belfast, 8-10 September 2015. This meeting will also be attended by Gareth Long from the GLPM external evaluation team. The final external evaluation outcome will be a final overview report on the project’s main successes and achievements with reference to its sustainability in particular and also to any significant challenges faced together with how they were addressed.

This report therefore is designed to address some key aspects related to the requirements and expectations of a two-year transnational cooperation initiative. There will be some consideration of final outcomes and / or the preparation for them, but the main focus will be on the way in which the project has proceeded against the planned work programme and deadlines, the way in which the partnership has performed, the management of the project and the way in which the project has addressed and responded to the comments and recommendations from the end of year one external evaluation report and especially the feedback received from the ECORYS assessment of the project’s Progress Report.

The project is now approaching its close and to-date there has been four project meetings / workshops. The first, in October 2013 in Brussels was attended by Gareth Long from the external evaluation team; the second took place in Barcelona in April 2014, the third in Brno in September 2014 and the fourth in Barcelona in April 2015. The contract required participation in at least two of the meetings / workshops and therefore by participating in the final meeting, this requirement will have been met.

Whilst the complete detail of the evaluation strategy is not repeated here, it is worth noting and emphasising a few key aspects. First of these is that POOLS-3 was one of the final “Transfer of Innovation” projects under the de-centralised wing of Leonardo da Vinci in the Lifelong Learning Programme. Whilst such an initiative shares characteristics with other transnational projects, the transfer element is a relatively unique aspect, leading to a partnership essentially based on those who “export” and those who “import”; but this should not result in a one-way process where the receiving partners remain ultimately mostly passive. Previous reports on POOLS-3 have emphasised the strength of the partnership in this respect. This aspect will be visited again in this report. Second, there is an evolutionary element to most two-year such initiatives; which can be summarised generally as saying the first year concentrates on preparation and the second on delivering.

Again, previous reports referred to the fact that POOLS-3 achieved numerous outcomes at quite an early stage and so again, this will be re-visited here – especially in the context that if outcomes were achieved early / on time, has the partnership utilised the “breathing space” to work on enhancing their sustainability? The third aspect to be emphasised is the importance to the evaluators of the way in which the project has responded to feedback; the formal processes from GLPM and ECORYS have already been mentioned, but this responsiveness should also include reaction to the comments from the target groups and end-users.

It is important to post a reminder of the Leonardo aims and targets as featured in the Call of 2013, including:

* + - To support participants in training and further training activities in the acquisition and the use of knowledge, skills and qualifications to facilitate personal development
    - To support improvements in quality and innovation in vocational education and training systems, institutions and practices
    - To enhance the attractiveness of vocational education and training and mobility for employers and individuals and to facilitate the mobility of working trainees

This will be evaluated in terms of the success in meeting the specific aims and objectives of the project, which are (taken from section B.4 of the original application):

“The project will promote and exploit CALL (Computer Assisted Language Learning) in Catalan, Czech and Irish language VET contexts, building on the development work in nine other languages through the original UK-led POOLS project (2005-7, winner of 2009 European Silver Award for Innovation and Creativity in Lifelong Learning) and subsequent ES-led TOI to 3 more languages via POOLS-2 (2009-2011). The consortium will be led by the UK POOLS promoter with assistance from the DK partner, with a mix of private and public sector educational providers with a VET locus…

…The TOI will adapt and translate the core materials (course book, course manuals), produce multimedia source materials for use in CALL materials development in the three new languages, and pilot teacher training courses on CALL for these languages. (“…Specialised teacher training for language teachers in vocational education and training needs to be developed” – Languages for Jobs report for the European Strategic Framework for Education and Training, ET2020, p5.)

The project addresses recommendations 2 and 5 of the Languages for Jobs report, by promoting new methods of teaching languages in order to motivate learners to keep languages in their study programmes (2) and developing specialised language training modules and methodology for teachers and trainers in VET (5).

Irish, Czech, and Catalan language teachers in VET will be equipped with sample CALL materials. An in-service training programme for disseminating new skills and practices will be embedded in the teacher support infrastructure for these languages, supported by a locally appropriate course book and guide.”

**I The milestone / work programme approach to recording the progress of the project**

The work plan has 11 work packages.

**WP1 Project Management** 10/2013 – 09/2015 (SMO, UK)was well-designed and carefully planned in the initial application and as a result of this and the experience of the personnel involved, project management has consistently been a strength of POOLS-3. Credit for project management naturally is due to SMO as the overall coordinator and to SDE as the experienced partner with many of the main ideas that led to the implementation of the project, but credit also is due to each partner for being very committed, motivated and keen to participate throughout. Email communication in particular has been evidence of this as whenever a posting appears from any partner there are rapid, detailed and positive replies from each other partner. As a result of effective overall planning, management and partner communication, delays have been minimal and more often outcomes and outputs have been realised ahead of schedule. The highlights of project management identified in the first year (the monitoring tools, the reporting processes with the UK NA ECORYS, their transparency, the frequency and depth of internal project communication and the immediate posting of results on the project web-site) has continued throughout the second year. A potential challenge to this was the withdrawal of the lead coordinator, Gordon Wells, from the project as a result of an internal promotion, but such was the overall management coherence and momentum that no negative impact on the project has been observed.

An observation made in the previous report is worth repeating here:

“The lack of any real obstacles or challenges to management so far is not necessarily an indication of a “straightforward” project but more likely an indication of a very effective, calm and appropriate approach to management at the centralised and partner levels. All involved should be commended for this.”

This is of particular importance in a Transfer of Innovation project where the risk can be that the partnership essentially operates on a two-tier basis, reflecting the “export / import” model described previously. The in-depth, frequent and proactive communication from the “import” partners is an indication of their value and contribution to the content and processes developed. They have certainly not been content to simply receive, but have been very active in suggesting improvement; developing innovative new elements and ensuring that in the main, targets are reached and exceeded (see for example the sheer volume of units in Czech, Irish Gaelic and Catalan on the web-site).

The minutes of the penultimate project meeting (Barcelona, April 13-16) are also a positive reflection of several aspects of the project, including management. First, it is clear that they are designed for the appropriate purpose, i.e. that of being an accurate record of the meeting, summary of the work so far and planning for the work ahead. This sounds obvious, but under pressures of time, minutes of meetings in some project appear to be more a response to contractual requirements from the funding agency rather than a workable, meaningful tool to assist in project management. The minutes feature at the start a summary of the six-month progress reports (those which are submitted to ECORYS as required) and given the timing of the meeting provide a valuable insight into the aforementioned evolution of the project from preparation to delivery. In other words, the summaries include from the Catalan partner - reference to the benefits of cooperation and exchange of results with another ongoing transnational initiative (evidence of synergies); from the CZ partner, reference to the fact that very positively, accreditation of the POOLS-3 course material had been achieved in CZ (evidence of sustainability and mainstreaming) and from the Ulster partner, description of the value of having a trial period with the POOLS-3 materials in a workshop for Chinese teachers (evidence of transfer into other sectors/ languages) all indicate outcomes and activities that very positively reflect the aims of a Transfer of Innovation successful project.

**WP2 Quality Management** 10/2013 – 09/2015 (SMO, UK) features both internal and external mechanisms. The external assessment delivers the QM reports prior to key administrative milestones (e.g. prior to the Progress and Final Reports) to enable adjustments in order to deliver the best quality.

Most of the comments made on project management are also valid for the approach to Quality Control. Likewise, meeting minutes serve to indicate the effectiveness of the project quality mechanisms as well as the straightforward progress of the project. As with many aspects of the project, the strategy was well-conceived at the application stage and has been pursued well by the partners individually and collectively.

The regular internal monitoring reports have proved useful both to partners and as the basis for information gathering for the regular reporting to ECORYS in the UK. They have meant that most of the required information has been already available at key reporting milestones. One comment to make at this stage as the project prepares for its completion is that there is a relative gap in the most recent up-dates. It is understood that to a significant extent, the final regular report will coincide with information gathering and finalisation for the final report; notwithstanding this, the most recent reports on the web-site coveer the period up to the end of March 2015 and it is important to ensure that no unanticipated aspects or challenges have been faced by partners in the period between the end of March and the final month of the project. The internal reporting forms themselves are very good, covering clearly and efficiently numerous key aspects (e.g. communications within the partnership, engagement with external stakeholders, etc). To an extent, the project is a victim of its own successes in this respect, as the web-site is always very up-to-date and so the “uncovered period from the end of March 2015 onwards is more noticeable as a result; the observation is not a critical one, rather to recommend that the project makes clear in its final report that the biannual regular reporting was conceived in such as way that the final report would include the final updating of the internal reporting procedures.

As with all aspects of the project, the presentation of the monitoring and quality assurance procedures are clearly and transparently presented; it is refreshing to see for example that both internal and external evaluation results are presented publicly rather than being password-protected. Not only is this of clear benefit to project evaluators and assessors, it provides public access to the project’s open and honest self-criticism which in turn helps to reinforce the gravitas and bona fides of the main outcomes:

## Ongoing project evaluation

* [EXTERNAL EVALUATION YEAR 1 QUALITY REPORT](http://languages.dk/archive/pools-3/evaluation/Pools-3%20year%201%20External%20Evaluation%20Report%20Final.docx)
* [EXTERNAL EVALUATION STRATEGY & INITIAL REPORT](http://languages.dk/archive/pools-3/evaluation/POOLS%203%20external%20evaluation%20strategy%20and%20initial%20report%20Dec%202013-1.doc)
* [3rd biannual activity report from SMO](http://languages.dk/archive/pools-3/Reporting/Report%203/SMO%203rd%206%20monthly%20report%20new%20version.doc)
* [3rd biannual activity report from EfVET](http://languages.dk/archive/pools-3/Reporting/Report%203/6%20monthly%20reportEfvet3.doc)
* [3rd biannual activity report from Pelican](http://languages.dk/archive/pools-3/Reporting/Report%203/PELICAN%206MonthlyReport3.doc)
* [3rd biannual activity report from Stucom](http://languages.dk/archive/pools-3/Reporting/Report%203/6%20monthly%20report%203%20STUCOM.doc)
* [3rd biannual activity report from Ulster](http://languages.dk/archive/pools-3/Reporting/Report%203/Ulster%203rd%20Biannual%20Report.doc)
* [3rd biannual activity report from SDE](http://languages.dk/archive/pools-3/Reporting/Report%203/SDE6MonthlyReport3.doc)
* [2nd biannual activity report from SMO](http://languages.dk/archive/pools-3/Reporting/Report%202/SMO%202nd%206%20monthly%20report%20new%20version.doc)
* [2nd biannual activity report from EfVET](http://languages.dk/archive/pools-3/Reporting/Report%202/6%20monthly%20report%20_EfVET%20II.doc)
* [2nd biannual activity report from Pelican](http://languages.dk/archive/pools-3/Reporting/Report%202/PELICAN%202nd%206%20monthly%20report.doc)
* [2nd biannual activity report from Stucom](http://languages.dk/archive/pools-3/Reporting/Report%202/6MonthlyReport2Stucom.doc)
* [2nd biannual activity report from Ulster](http://languages.dk/archive/pools-3/Reporting/Report%202/UlsterReport2.doc)
* [2nd biannual activity report from SDE](http://languages.dk/archive/pools-3/Reporting/Report%202/SDE6MonthlyReport2.doc)
* [1st biannual activity report from SMO](http://languages.dk/archive/pools-3/Reporting/Report%201/SMO/SMO%201st%206%20monthly%20report%20new%20version.doc)
* [1st biannual activity report from EfVET](http://languages.dk/archive/pools-3/Reporting/Report%201/EfVET/EfVET%206%20monthly%20report%20new%20version.doc)
* [1st biannual activity report from Pelican](http://languages.dk/archive/pools-3/Reporting/Report%201/Pelican/PELICAN%20first%20biannual%20report.doc)
* [1st biannual activity report from Stucom](http://languages.dk/archive/pools-3/Reporting/Report%201/Stucom/6%20monthly%20report%20new%20version.doc)
* [1st biannual activity report from Ulster](http://languages.dk/archive/pools-3/Reporting/Report%201/Ulster/Ulster%201st%206%20monthly%20report.doc)
* [1st biannual activity report from SDE](http://languages.dk/archive/pools-3/Reporting/Report%201/SDE/SDE%20first%20biannual%20report.doc)
* [3rd workshop evaluation results](http://languages.dk/archive/pools-3/Meetings/Brno/BrnoSeptember14EvaluationSummary.doc)
* [2nd workshop evaluation results](http://languages.dk/archive/pools-3/Meetings/Barcelona/BarcelonaMarch14EvaluationResults.doc)
* [1st workshop evaluation results](http://languages.dk/archive/pools-3/Meetings/Kick-off/BrusselsOct13EvaluationResults.doc)

The clarity of presentation on the web-site is also an effective response by the project to the recommendation in the previous external evaluation report, which was to provide a higher and clearer profile for the six-monthly internal quality reports and to consider elements that were emphasised in the application in terms of how they are presented on the web-site. Subsequent to the second project workshop, the focus of the meetings and workshops have clearly and consistently reflected what was planned for them in the application, whilst acknowledging the need for some flexibility as any such initiative evolves over time.

One final comment in this context, and linked to those made earlier on the period post March 2015, is a recommendation to clarify in terms of the posts on the web-site the 4th workshop evaluation results as soon as is practical (from the workshop in Barcelona in April 2015) in order to ensure they are present in advance of those from the final workshop, in Belfast in September 2015. The above copied text from the site shows that under “Ongoing project evaluation” only 3 workshops have the partners evaluations posted, whilst in the subsequent section (“Workshops, meetings and schedules” there are summary results from all 4 workshops to-date. It would appear to be a case of just a need for site maintenance and tidying.

**WP3 Communication Platform** 10/2013 – 09/2015 (Pelikan, CZ) and **WP5 Dissemination** 10/2013 – 09/2015 (EfVET, BE) **deal with dissemination**.

Project communication and dissemination (both internal and with the target groups and stakeholders) have already been identified as strengths in the project and were assessed at length in the previous external evaluation report. That report covered the period up top the end of September 2014 and it is clear from visiting the site as well as through monitoring of partner email communication that the activities have been maintained at a high level since then. For example, in the immediate period subsequent to the previous report, each of the importing countries produced 20 videos that would be used for the pilot programmes.

The period also saw the project referencing itself against related initiatives (“VideoforALL” and “Clili4U” ensuring that it maintained a significant profile in the current state of the art.

The subsequent period of the project witnessed the implementation of the pilot courses and so clearly it justifiable for this period to be concerned with the courses and the evaluation. Even so, the postings on the web-site are relatively few during this time, especially in terms of dissemination and exploitation activities. It is acknowledged that very significant achievements (including the accreditation of the course in CZ) took place at this time; however, whilst the dissemination materials (e.g. brochures) are present and the aforementioned very numerous videos are present on the site, there is room for clarification when it comes to examples of other dissemination activities as they realise the dissemination strategy. It is clear from the email communication witnessed between partners, the references to dissemination activities in the regular internal monitoring report, etc, that activities have been ongoing, but their presentation on the site AS dissemination activities could be improved (see for example, how specifically identifiable dissemination outcomes compare with the evaluation and monitoring outcomes).

Again, it important to emphasise this is a concern more with the presentation of the dissemination activities that have taken place, rather than the number or scope of activities themselves. For example, the POOLS-3 facebook presence continues to be very successful and in a way serves as perhaps one of the main dissemination and news tools of the project. However, by the same token, a visit to <https://www.facebook.com/projectpools3> provides the visitor with more, and more topical dissemination and other project activities than does the project’s own home web page.

More specifically with regard to the POOLS-3 use of social media, then the comments from the end of year one evaluation report are valid here also:

“Furthermore, whilst the use of Facebook, Twitter et al are fairly standard practices for projects currently, the POOLS-3 use of them has been a model of excellent practice – the Facebook presence in particular is very dynamic and focuses on the fun and enjoyable collaborations that have taken place particularly when it comes to the video creations.

It is a very up-to-date and dynamic presence with very numerous and consistent entries, posts, comments, pictures and news throughout the project lifetime so far. It also indicates (and again the external evaluators wish to emphasise this in the context of the project’s acknowledgement of ECORYS’s guidelines on dissemination) clear evidence of reach beyond the project consortium to new countries and to new sectors”.

The recommendation at this stage of the project is to prepare and discuss at the final project meeting, the most effective means to collate and present the dissemination activities and achievements in the context of a response to the effective dissemination strategy devised within the project and utilising also the recommendations from ECORYS, together with the advice from the external evaluation perspective to perhaps highlight key dissemination achievements on the web-site specifically as dissemination achievements (this could include featuring videos that are already present there or examples from the well-prepared numerous project newsletters – in other words ensuring that effort is not repeated to the same end, but is geared more towards ensuring that the considerable outcomes are rewarded with the highest possible public profile).

It is positive that a sophisticated visit counter is present on the web-site, and the aforementioned newsletters (which are incidentally, included in displays n the EACEA offices in Brussels) and project brochures are of high quality. Where perhaps some improvement could take place is in the recording the impact of the dissemination activities, for example, in addition to toal numbers reached through various means, what has been the specific impact upon smaller numbers – can information be gleaned on this impact through more informal and anecdotal feedback-gathering. It is likely that the positive “buzz” from participants in the project pilots would be effective promotional means for the project if their words were presented somehow for example on the web-site, in newsletter style.

**WP4 Exploitation and impact** 12/2013 – 09/2015 (SDE, DK) – to ensure real use of outcomes.

With regard to exploitation and impact, it is worth repeating some observations from the previous evaluation report:

“The envisaged activities associated specifically with exploitation and impact were well-conceived in the application and have been pursued from the project outset; the main measures for success were indicated to take place in the second year of the project, including exploitation being the emphasis of the fourth project meeting in March 2015 where a strategy for the remaining six months of the project will be finalised and include the means to calculate registrations, numbers of participants and the likely momentum of the project post-funding.

From the project application, there are in addition two elements concerning exploitation that are important to note:

The project partnership will also search for other language projects and networks that may cluster with our efforts and benefit from the POOLS‐3 outcomes.

Using national representatives, EfVET will assist with disseminating information on the results to the project target groups to attract these to the course, but also, more importantly, to offer similar courses based on our results.”

As the project draws to a conclusion, it is important to re-visit these aspects as this is further evidence of the way in which the POOLS-3 participants pay careful and consistent attention to the targets set out in the application as well as to the recommendations received from various parties as the project has proceeded. The fourth meeting actually took place in April 2015 and the minutes indicate that impact and sustainability played a prominent part in the discussions over the days of the meeting. Firstly, Pelikan received due credit for the accreditation of the POOLS-3 products in CZ.

Secondly, several other initiatives were cited as having reciprocal benefits in terms of synergies with POOLS-3, such as the EMEU (Engineering Mobility across Europe) project, another EU mobility project in Bilbao and CLIL4U. It was also noted that the sustainability of the TOOLS project outputs had been promoted by POOLS-3. The “Video for All” connections and video dissemination work have helped promote POOLS-3 and “Gain Time” (looking at Flip methodologies) and the EUapps4us projects also have reciprocal beneficial links with POOLS-3.

The minutes also make clear that the project partners also considered likely further long-term post-project impact. Pelican’s success in obtaining Ministry of Education accreditation had already been noted. Stucom also will continue to incorporate insights and developments through POOLS-3 in future training delivery within its catchment area. Ulster noted that CALL aspects developed through POOLS-3 were now embedded in both years of its Diploma course across three different centres with over 150 participants. The Department of Education’s strategy for Primary Languages would receive continuing input from Ulster University as a professional associate in the Curriculum for Examinations and Assessment process (rewardinglearning.co.uk). The island-wide Conradh na Gaeilge link, discussed on Day One of the Barcelona meeting, would also be continuing. It is very positive to see that POOLS-3 is a leading player in the current state of the art, partly because of its own strengths but also partly because of its willingness to engage with other related initiatives.

The recommendation at this stage is for the final meeting agenda to include time for a discussion and collation of the sustainability and impact evidence to-date; the discussions can consider whether the information is gathered country-by-country or thematically (e.g. by sector, or specific target group, or specific language, or specific challenges, etc) or both.

**WP6 Adaptation and translation of the POOLS course guide** 11/2013 – 08/2015 (STUCOM, ES), **WP7 Adaptation and translation of the POOLS course book** 10/2013 – 06/2015 (Pelikan, CZ),

Little can be added to the positive comments made in the end of year one evaluation report with regard to the main POOLS-3 outcomes, as they were realised in a draft form early and adapted regularly before piloting to such an extent that relatively limited feedback in terms of changes or improvements were received as a result of the pilot courses. In addition to the strengths of the documents themselves, they are presented clearly on the web-site and have been in place for significant time – allowing for maximum potential visits by interested parties. Again, it is very positive to see the early posting of high quality outcomes on a project web-site early in the project rather than as a last minute product.

What is also extremely positive is that even though feedback on the units and guides was positive, the partnership did not “rest” in this respect but continued to discuss how adaptations, improvements and methods could be improved or adapted to ensure the widest possible reach of the outcomes, as evidenced again by the minutes of the fourth project meeting:

“Much of this debate had been anticipated in the feedback sessions. It was clear from these that no further changes were recommended at this stage to either the Introduction to CALL or the Course Units Catalogue, the main POOLS-3 products. There is still time and scope to make some amendments on a language-specific basis in the event of any such needs becoming apparent from ongoing piloting with Irish and Catalan.

A useful discussion was nonetheless held with regard to both training delivery format and possible new software developments. The training course manual was felt to provide a very useful framework for structuring the contents, but flexibility of delivery method was felt to be one of the keys to success, particularly as different trainees might require substantially different time allocations in order to successfully complete the course – depending, for example, on their pre-existing levels of experience in teaching, use of IT etc.

Also, on the software development front, consideration could be given to further refinement of the file uploading function in Clilstore (though strictly speaking outside the scope of POOLS-3). Other avenues that could be worth exploring included the use of plug-ins to give the platform a more Moodle-like functionality.”

**WP8 Digital video/audio source materials** 03/2014 – 10/2014 (SMO, UK) and **WP10 Instructional DVDs** 10/2013 – 08/2014 (SDE, DK) deal with the adaptation, translation, and preparation of the project outputs to ensure these can be used with the Catalan, Czech, and Irish languages.

Again, assessment of these aspects begins with an acknowledgment of the positive start to their preparation made in the end of first year report. From the kick-off meeting, videos and guides were produced, supported by the online dictionary developments and clear presentation and explanation of intended use. There are several aspects of this report that repeat what has already been said and also repeat the observations from last year’s report, but in many ways, this challenge emphasises the strengths of the project. The early achievement of significant results and the high quality and responsiveness to target group needs of the outcomes are both due in many ways to the same essential three factors; the strength and realism of the original application and work programme; the excellent selection of partners and the partners ensuing continued motivation and high level of performance, and the strong management processes both in terms of centralised coordination and partners’ own management of their responsibilities and willingness to contribute dynamically to the work packages led by others. An additional factor reflecting each of the above is the dynamism of the relationship between, for want of a better description, the exporting and importing partners. References have been made previously to the challenges of a Transfer of Innovation project; whilst the central aspect – that of the transfer itself – can be a clear one, the challenge is often to maintain an active, equal and balanced participation by partners – it can be the case that the exporters dominate and the importers are passive, or that the exporters fail to include proper provision in the work programme for cultural and national adaptation to outcomes and processes. In POOLS-3 these challenges have not only been avoided / overcome, but the dynamics of the partnership collaboration has consistently been a very noticeable highlight. In the context of this work package, the target country / language partners have been very active in the creation of the videos and associated materials but have done so collaboratively, with each commenting on, supporting and assisting the work of the others and all within the effective guidance of the UK coordinating and DK partner.

Clearly the assessor of the POOLS-3 final report will have access to the project web-site and the videos have a high profile there, but just in summary terms, 25 units in Catalan are presented linked word by word to more than 100 other languages, likewise 21 from CZ and more than 120 Irish units. These are high level achievements both in number and quality and traditional topics (such as visiting the supermarket) are interspersed with more culturally specific aspects, again reflecting the thoroughness of approach and the likelihood for longer-lasting impact. These language units are further augmented by the presence of links to additional units and activities in Scottish Gaelic and Danish; therefore, whilst the early question of what would be available in which language was clarified in the discussions between POOLS-3 and ECORYS, the project has still sought to broaden the language pool as much as possible.

**WP9 In-service pilot courses/workshops** 10/2014 – 08/2015 (UU, UK**)** is used for piloting, evaluation and adjusting the outputs. It tests the adapted materials through in-service courses (workshops followed by peer reviews).

**WP11 Final edits of outcomes** 07/2015 – 09/2015 (SDE, DK) – final editing, adaptation and compilation of the project outputs based on the pilot testing and the external quality expert’s recommendations.

The outcomes associated with these work packages will be the main focus of the final external evaluation report, partly because they are still essentially “open” work packages but also to fully utilise the facility of the final project meeting to gain access to total number of participants, feedback, the final amendments made and to what end, and as identified previously, how all of the above will form the longer-term impact and sustainability plans of the project.

**II The responses the project has made to feedback**

In the external evaluation strategy, reference was made to the external evaluation methodology featuring consideration of:

* + - the responses the project makes to the feedback from the UK NA assessors on the application and Progress Report
    - the responses the project makes to the internal evaluation mechanisms led by the UK promoter, SMO with the support of SDE the DK partner.
    - the responses the project makes to the feedback from the external evaluation process.

As mentioned, and as previously highlighted both through the external evaluation process and the recommendations from ECORYS, to these needs to be added monitoring of the way in which the project collects and responds to the feedback it gets from the target groups, end-users and stakeholders generally – and particularly the way this is performed in the context of the ToI emphases on informing national VET policy in each participating country.

A strength of the management approach in POOLS-3 and the commitment and motivation of the partners, is the high profile given to feedback and the means to address it. Each meeting agenda has specifically included items to this end and the partnership has addressed them during these face-to-face meetings as well as in the ongoing progress of the project. Careful consideration has resulted in an effective reporting procedure and an effective communication process with ECORYS. For example, in the initial stages some funding agency feedback referred to planned language translations and the apparent “omission” of the BE partner from this process. The strong communication channels ensured that this issue was clarified early and it was made clear and agreed with ECORYS that the BE partner was not an importing partner but rather a partner tasked with leading on dissemination via its VET networks.

The project submitted its Progress Report on schedule and received a quick approval and assessment statement from ECORYS, the main content feedback is summarised below:

**“Strengths:**

Partnership-working appears to be one of the key strengths of the project so far. The project appears to have been well planned and the partners seem very motivated and committed to the success of the project. They should be commended on their work during the first half of the project. Project management arrangements appear comprehensive and the project appears well managed. All partners are fully involved in the workload with the promoter providing support where necessary. At this stage the partnership appears to be on track to achieve the project goals.

The involvement of all partners in dissemination activity is encouraging and it is promising that a wide range of activity has been carried out during the first half of the project. The use of social media is also encouraging and should be explored further in the next phase of the project.

**Areas for improvement/ Recommendations:**

From the information provided there appear to be no major weaknesses at this point. However, there are a couple of areas to consider during the next phase of the project:

It is noted that the external evaluator makes the recommendation that the partnership are recording the impact of their dissemination. This should be followed-up in the next phase of the project in order to highlight the impact on the partners and target group at the final report stage.

It is positive that all materials are hosted on the website and this also demonstrates transparency as all materials are easily accessible to the partners and visitors to the website. However, as there is now a great deal of material on the site the partners should ensure that the website is easily navigated and signposted, particularly for those who are new to the projects and website. It is recommended that the partnership seeks feedback from users regarding the layout, look and materials available on the website.”

It appears a positive process that the ECORYS independent assessment of the Progress Report embraced also the comments made through the external evaluation process, helping the project to identify the main areas to consider as it proceeded through its second year. The result of this is that the strength of the partnership and its levels of performance has been identified and highlighted by two independent sources, whilst the same identification process has highlighted the need to enhance recording the impact of the dissemination work undertaken.

Where there is some divergence however, is with regard to the comments from the external evaluation perspective and the ECORYS independent assessment process in regard to the project web-site and its presentation of content. From the external evaluation perspective, it can be seen that there is indeed significant amounts of information available but conversely, the external evaluators have benefited from involvement in several funded initiatives where the <http://www.languages.dk> base URL has been the home site of the project and has seen the positive aspects of having a clear single presence to present the outcomes of several projects with considerable synergies. However, it is entirely correct that user and target groups feedback should inform the format and look of the site and so the priority from the POOLS-3 perspective should be to gain feedback in this way.

The Progress Report assessment feedback also featured recommendations for inclusion / addressing in the Final Report:

“The below actions points need to be addressed when preparing the Final Report, unless otherwise stated.

**Content**

1. The application indicates that partners are aiming to test the products with a minimum of 20 teachers for each new language. Comprehensive details regarding the testing should be provided at the final report stage including the feedback provided by those involved and details as to how the products have been further adapted in light of the feedback received.

2. It would also be useful to provide further information regarding any wider consultation with the target group during the adaptation phase prior to testing period. In addition it would be useful to provide more details regarding the extent of adaptation by the partner organisations and how input from the new partners and the target group has led to changes to the original products. It is recommended that more details regarding this be provided at the final report stage.”

Whilst the web-site is indeed the host of very significant numbers of documents, course details, videos, guidelines, etc, there is limited inclusion of documentation of the testing processes and their results. Of course it is understood that such data can be confidential or relatively uninteresting to the site visitor but on the other hand, such data does provide substantiation in terms of the quality of the outcomes, especially when adaptations and improvements have been made in the testing phases that began in December 2014. The evaluation questionnaire is featured (in all relevant partner languages) on the site, but the results of its use could not be located. It is not a requirement that they appear on the site, but the recommendation is to ensure that they are featured at a high level of visibility in the final report and perhaps a summary of the process, and especially the changes they led to, appear on the project web-site.

The intention is for these two comments and recommendations from the Progress Report assessment to be specifically addressed at the final project meeting (in addition to the attention paid to them as the project has progressed from the interim stage) and that plans, summary reports and / or data tables will be agreed upon and drawn up in preparation for the Final Report

**III Conclusions and Recommendations**

POOLS-3 has continued its excellent progress throughout the second year. Most of the deliverables have been achieved, and to a high standard and very positively, been made available publicly on the web-site. The main challenge to the project in the second year has been the withdrawal of the main coordinator from SMO due to promotion, but the strength of the partnership, together with the institutional commitment shown by SMO in quickly finding replacements, has made the change one without identifiable problems.

The quality of the original application, especially in terms of the work programme and the way in which it specifically was designed to reflect Transfer of Innovation targets, as well as the quality of the partners selected, has ensured the positive momentum has been maintained.

As a result of the early realisation of many of the key deliverables, at least in draft form, has meant that the project has extensively been able to respond to the feedback it has received from both formal and informal sources, including the ultimate end-users and target groups. Thus, the relevance and suitability of the courses and their accompanying materials is likely to be guaranteed and have a sustainable and measurable impact into the longer-term.

Management at the central level has been excellent, and the relevance of the aims identified at the application stage has meant that on a context of rapidly developing technical tools, the relevance of POOLS-3 has been maintained and essentially been increased because of the surpassing of initial targets in several instances (see for example the number of units and supporting videos available on the web-site).

Again, it is worth emphasising also the effectiveness of the communication and ongoing contact between POOLS-3 and the managing agency, ECORYS. This has resulted in progress continuing to be carefully mapped against the original target outcomes in a way that ensures consistent innovation whilst ensuring the contractual requirements are met. The issues with regard to the number of translations / languages for the final outcomes and the different role of one partner (EfVET), were clarified early and clearly so that significant delays in progress did not take place.

In terms of where the project is now, the main recommendations from the external evaluation perspective are to ensure the most effective final reporting of the achievements as possible. The contractual final report form is a detailed and extensive document, but does not always lend itself consistently to full reporting of, for example, likely impact in the longer-term, or informal or anecdotal evidence of the impact experienced by the target groups on a personal level. Therefore, the final meeting will be a valuable opportunity both to recap on what has been done so far, ensure the plans are in place to complete any outstanding results but mainly to plan together how to most effectively present the feedback from the target groups, the way the project has responded to them and how to present the exploitation plan in terms of its practical implementation as the initial project closes.

The final external evaluation report will include reference and consideration of these aspects, together with a review of the final project meeting / workshop.

Gareth Long and Lydia Pavlopoulou, GLPM, August 2015