



Executive Agency, Education, Audiovisual and Culture



**MATURE**

**Making Adult Teaching Useful, Relevant and Engaging**

Progress Report

Public Part

## Project information

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Beneficiary organisation: University of Leicester

Project coordinator: Professor John Benyon

Project coordinator organisation: University of Leicester

Project coordinator telephone number: +44.116.2525922

Project coordinator email address: [jt2@le.ac.uk](mailto:jt2@le.ac.uk)

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## Executive Summary

Later-life learning can bring many benefits for older people in Europe and for the wider ageing society but there are barriers that prevent these benefits from being realised. MATURE is a Grundtvig multilateral project which focuses on overcoming the barriers to adult education faced by older people, which are often related to health, dependency, culture, ethnicity and attitudes. The project's goal is to develop effective training that enables practitioners to reach, engage and motivate older adults so they can take part in learning.

### Target audience

The MATURE project is aimed at three target groups: (1) professional and voluntary teachers, trainers, providers and managers in lifelong learning; (2) individuals and intermediary organisations from outside education who work with older people and those who are disadvantaged; (3) organisations in a position to mainstream and multiply the project's products in Europe.

### Project objectives

Evidence shows that adult education fails to engage many older people. The aim of MATURE is to develop training that helps to surmount obstacles to learning for older adults. The key objectives include: (1) to analyse the barriers to learning affecting older people; (2) to learn from examples of good practice; (3) to explore the role of intermediary organisations and develop guidance on how to support older learners; (4) to prepare face-to-face and self-study training for paid and voluntary teachers and educators; (5) to take a multi-lingual approach to the project products; (6) to promote the outputs across Europe to mainstream and multiply their impact. MATURE is having a positive effect in ways such as highlighting the benefits of later-life learning, showing the changes needed to widen participation and providing ways of making those changes happen. There will also be better communication and understanding between those who work with disadvantaged older people.

### Participants involved in MATURE

The project involves eight partners from different European countries with a variety of experience, skills, and knowledge. It builds on the previous experience of working together and the knowledge acquired during previous projects. The partners' competences, past collaborative experience and expertise complement each other and enable the partnership to work together co-operatively and successfully and to produce results of a high standard.

### Approaches used

Different methods are employed to meet MATURE's ambitious objectives. It is examining data on older adults who do not participate in learning; publishing a report on the web; piloting and publishing face-to-face and self-study training programmes, in all partners' languages; organising four transnational meetings, including three workshops to find out the views of intermediary bodies and older people; organising a pan-European conference; creating a web site; producing an advice booklet. The added value of the project includes insight, self-reflection and innovative thinking about learning and 'hard-to-reach' older people. The quality assurance plan employs qualitative and quantitative methods including online surveys; group discussions; reviews by users and participants; feedback questionnaires; assessment by a forum of experts. Dissemination uses methods such as leaflets, e-bulletins, web site, facebook, communications with user groups, journals and publicity for workshops and conferences. The exploitation plan focuses on mainstreaming and multiplying and sustainability including uploading the training course on to the Grundtvig European training database and maintaining the MATURE web site after the project.

### **Major achievements so far**

MATURE has made very good progress in its first 12 months with planned activities proceeding smoothly and on time. The project structures and working procedures, and the dissemination, exploitation and evaluation plans, are all in place. The project handbook and the corporate design and logo were agreed, and the publicity leaflets and two e-bulletins have been distributed. The web site (<http://matureproject.eu>) is fully operational and the project also has a facebook page at: <https://www.facebook.com/MatureProject?fref=ts>. Other major achievements include two transnational meetings and workshops.

Work package 2 has been completed and the research data were successfully collected for the MATURE guidance report (<http://matureproject.eu/research-report>). The draft face-to-face training programme and the draft self-study online training have been produced. The quality assessments have been positive with work and meetings described as 'very successful' and 'very constructive and fruitful' and good evaluations of the two workshops with intermediary organisations and older people, which were said to be 'very effective' with many 'excellent' presentations. A great deal of dissemination has been undertaken with good impact, for example through the web and facebook sites, and contacts via email lists and conferences and events. The MATURE project has been fortunate and has experienced few difficulties. There are high levels of co-operation and a good sense of common purpose.

### **Plans and prospects**

MATURE has reached the half-way point with all the significant milestones achieved. Plans are well-advanced for the second year. New information will be added to the facebook page and the web site so that it remains a comprehensive guide to the project and its products. The training programmes will be amended in light of the pilot testing and final versions will be agreed at the third transnational meeting in Switzerland in February 2014. At that meeting the advice booklet *Why Learning Matters for Older Adults* will be discussed in a workshop involving intermediary groups and older people. All the project's principal products will be scrutinised by the MATURE forum of experts and amended in light of feedback. The final training programme materials and advice booklet, translated in to each partner's language, will be launched at the MATURE conference on 'Older People and Participation in Learning' in September 2014. This will involve participants from target user audiences, including mainstreamers and multipliers as well as teachers and trainers, intermediary groups and older people themselves. A of the conference will be uploaded to the web site to add to the body of knowledge that underpins the project and the training programmes.

All activities will continue to be evaluated for quality assurance. Continued emphasis will be placed on effective dissemination including communications with key contacts, links with other networks and projects, distribution of flyers at conferences and meetings, email notifications, e-bulletins, and the use of social media and the web site. The partnership will implement its exploitation strategy including expanding the web pages on 'MATURE and you' and developing a MATURE course for the Grundtvig European training database. The MATURE goal is to develop effective ways to address the training needs of adult education practitioners in respect of reaching, engaging and motivating older adults who do not readily participate in learning. The plans for the second year of the partnership aim to realise this aim by completing production and delivery of the project's key products.

### **The project web site**

The web pages (<http://matureproject.eu>) include information about the MATURE project, the partners involved, face-to-face training, self-study training, E-publications, events and conferences and a section entitled 'MATURE and you'. The web site also includes news and debate and discussion.

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# 1. Project Objectives

MATURE is a European multilateral project with the central aim of providing continuing professional development for practitioners in formal and non-formal adult education. The training focuses on how to reach, engage and motivate older adults. A feature of MATURE is to develop strategies to overcome age-related barriers to learning, such as those caused by health, dependency, low self-confidence, and cultural or attitudinal factors. The project also considers the role of intermediary agencies in facilitating older people's learning and presents a model that is collaborative within and beyond education providing for the well-being of older people through integrated responses to learning needs.

## The aim of MATURE

Later-life learning can bring many benefits for individuals, families, communities and countries in Europe. It helps to overcome social exclusion and isolation, and can promote older people's mental and physical health. Adult education may assist in maintaining well-being and independence in later life and it enriches the lives of individuals and communities. The MATURE project aims to examine the most effective ways of realising the benefits of learning for older people and of promoting these activities for wider numbers of people. The project aims to make adult teaching useful, relevant and engaging for older people.

The goal of the MATURE project is to provide training to improve teaching and learning for older adults in the fields of formal and non-formal adult education. The training focuses on ways to connect with and motivate non-participant groups of older people and fulfil their learning needs. MATURE training provides tools and ideas to target and service the needs of older adults whose well-being may be enhanced through participation, the acquisition of new skills and the engendering of positive attitudes to learning and learning contexts. In the spirit of collaborative and joined-up working the project aims to produce information and advice for intermediary agencies about learning and its benefits for older adults and their role in the process of engagement. The MATURE team is focusing on long-term solutions and sustainable responses to regular and on-going engagement with hard-to-reach people by looking at health/dependency, cultural and attitudinal factors in general rather than at specific cohorts of older people.

## The project's objectives

The MATURE project builds on the breadth and experience of its partners and their connections to work towards its core goals. These objectives can be summarised as follows:

- Identify and analyse the barriers to engagement in learning faced by older adults who feature in national data on non-participatory groups.
- Seek examples of good practice of engaging hard-to-reach older adults.
- Extrapolate from this research key and common concepts and strategies to form the basis of a European response to the engagement of disadvantaged older people.
- Explore the role of intermediary agencies, organisations and individuals in supporting older people to take action and publish information and advice.
- Assess the potential of intermediaries to overcome barriers to taking part in learning.
- Configure the outcomes of exploratory work into face-to-face and self-study training. The training aims to package practical strategies for engaging and motivating hard-to-reach older adults with examples of empowering curriculum planning and analyses of effective methodologies and content. It provides support for practitioners wishing to widen participation among those most at risk from exclusion from learning.

- Test the training and advice within partner countries and elsewhere in Europe.
- Ensure that MATURE products are of high standards and quality through the implementation of a comprehensive monitoring and evaluation plan.
- Make the products of MATURE as widely accessible as possible during the lifetime of the project and beyond.
- Take a multi-lingual approach to the publication of project products.
- Make appropriate links on behalf of the project across Europe so that it and its products are part of the discourse on learning, teacher training and the welfare and well-being of older adults.

## **User communities**

The MATURE network has identified three main communities of target users at which its activities are aimed:

1. Professional and volunteer teachers, trainers and managers in adult education.
2. Individuals and intermediary organisations from outside education who work on behalf of older adults and those who are disadvantaged.
3. Organisations able to mainstream and multiply the project's products in Europe.

In addition to teachers and trainers, these target groups include adult education planners, providers and funders; older people and later-life learners; age-related organisations and older people's movements; health, welfare, housing, sports and arts bodies working with and for older people; and also researchers in this field, politicians and policy makers.

## **Impact upon the target user communities**

The MATURE project will have a positive impact upon the target user groups. The potential benefits of learning in later life are becoming more important as the financial, economic, social, health and human effects of demographic change are being realised across Europe. MATURE plans face-to-face and virtual engagement with project participants. Teachers are being co-opted to pilot training opportunities from 5 partner countries. Established regional and national networking is being used to make initial contact and continued engagement will be maintained virtually to check up on actions resulting from project participation, to receive further feedback on products and to disseminate new materials as they evolve.

Amongst the potential impact on the target groups, it is anticipated that participants in the project will come to understand and appreciate what changes are needed in current practice to widen participation and will develop the tools to help them make those changes. All MATURE partners have strong regional and national networks around older people and learning. Links beyond education are the main source of contact with intermediaries who have been invited to transnational meetings (with the older people they represent) where workshops have enabled an interchange of advice to feed into the project's products.

MATURE is building and maintaining contact with intermediaries throughout the project. As materials are developed, representatives from the groups are giving feedback on content and format. The role of intermediaries will be highlighted at the final Hamburg conference in which their active participation will be sought. The impact of MATURE will be better communication and understanding between those who work with disadvantaged older people enabling more joined-up responses to participation. Each partner has extensive contacts in Europe as a result of project and other work at national and European levels. The MATURE project will use these connections to make further links with European organisations that have interests in this field. Links will be 'active', with virtual communication maintained for information, advice and guidance.

## 2. Project Approach

The focus of the project is on surmounting age-related barriers to adult education, aggravated by additional disadvantages that impact negatively on participation. Statistics show that adult education fails to engage significant numbers of older people. Predecessor Grundtvig projects have shown that this failure results in part from the way that learning is developed and delivered, including its accessibility and content. There are also barriers to older people's engagement such as health, dependency, culture, ethnicity and attitudes. There is insufficient advice about how to address and overcome such barriers within educational contexts and consequently adult learning largely remains available for those with the skills to access and cope with it, not those who may benefit the most from it.

The approach of the MATURE project is based on four principles:

- The long-term independence and well-being of older people is dependent on their continued ability to learn and to act on learning.
- Effective learning for older people is best achieved through a collaborative process that goes beyond education and includes the individuals at whom learning is targeted.
- However challenging, the learning needs of all adults should be the concern of all learning providers.
- Changing learning might be demanding but it is certainly possible.

### Methods and activities

The project is using a variety of methods tailored to meet the project's ambitious aims and objectives. These include the following approaches, activities and ways of operating:

- Undertaking intensive investigation and desk-based research into the profiles of non-participant older adults as identified in national and international data and looking into solutions to and case studies of engaging hard-to-reach older adults.
- Producing a research report, published on the web, which forms the basis for the development of draft training content for the face-to-face and self-study programmes.
- Drafting and piloting the provisional face-to-face training programmes, involving participants from five partner countries in Europe.
- Drafting and piloting the provisional self-study training programmes, in English, French and German, and testing them in four countries.
- Amending and evaluating the face-to-face and self-study training programmes before translating them and publishing them in all partner languages.
- Organising four transnational European meetings (UK, Poland, Switzerland, Germany) to enable the team to monitor and reshape implementation of the project and to debate and resolve central issues.
- Finding out the views and opinions of intermediary bodies, and older people, on engagement and later-life learning, by organising three consultative workshops during the MATURE transnational European meetings.
- Arranging frequent virtual contact between partners to ensure that the momentum of the project is maintained.
- Disseminating information about MATURE and its activities through attendance at national events, distribution of flyers, links between websites and other means.
- Organising a pan-European conference in Hamburg in 2014, including plenary sessions and discussion groups, involving participants from the target user communities to share information and knowledge, showcase progress and findings, promote debate on central issues and themes, and to highlight the MATURE products.



- Creating a discrete web site (<http://matureproject.eu>) to enable the sharing of information and resources from and about the project during its lifetime and for a period of five years beyond.
- Writing and producing a booklet for those who work with older people suffering marginalisation as a result of disadvantage. The booklet, entitled *Why Learning Matters for Older Adults*, is being published in the seven languages of the consortium and distributed to intermediary organisations.
- Evaluating the quality of the work and outputs of the project by engaging a group of experts, making use of virtual forms of discussion and assessment.
- Setting up methods of social networking (such as Facebook) as a means of spreading information and inviting participation beyond the boundaries of the team.

### **Added value**

The MATURE project and the approach it adopts bring added value in a variety of ways. It brings insight and greater understanding about how to reach, engage and motivate older adults who do not readily participate in learning activities. The MATURE approach is intended to promote self-reflection and critical awareness amongst the project's partners as well as amongst the target user communities. One dimension of the added value that the project is bringing is to stretch the thinking of those involved to consider new methods and approaches. MATURE seeks to promote best practice and also to get those involved to look at things afresh. Teachers, managers, planners and providers of adult education, intermediary groups and organisations working in the field, and older people and learners, should be stimulated by the MATURE approach to question what they are and are not doing and to reassess their methods and activities.

From political and policy perspectives, MATURE raises critical questions about the benefits of later-life learning and the value of adult education in an ageing society. To what extent does money invested in later-life learning bring positive dividends for the state, for society and communities and for families and individuals? What are the benefits of learning for older people, for example in promoting social inclusion and active ageing, and what can be done to extend these benefits? What fresh and innovative thinking is needed, by local and national politicians, political parties and decision makers, to overcome the barriers to learning in the way of many older people? MATURE will bring added value by throwing the spotlight on to these and other policy issues concerned with learning and 'hard-to-reach' older adults.

### **Evaluation and quality assurance**

The project is firmly committed to achieving high standards in what it does and this commitment to quality assurance and evaluation appears as article 8 in the MATURE partner agreements which have been signed by each member of the consortium. Partner 7, AidLearn, Lisbon, Portugal, has the responsibility for internal and external evaluation and quality assurance within the MATURE project. The draft plan for quality assurance was prepared by December 2012 and was discussed at the kick-off meeting in Leicester in February 2013. A number of aims were agreed which included: providing feedback from partners to the coordinators and work package leaders to help management; raising awareness about quality within the consortium; pinpointing potential improvements in processes, products and outputs; improving decision making, communications, and transnational business meetings; focusing attention on activities such as dissemination, exploitation, sustainability and the needs of target groups and potential users of the products; helping the project to meet its quantitative and qualitative objectives.

The evaluation framework and quality strategy was agreed by the partnership in February 2013 and discussed again at the business meeting held in Torun, Poland, in July 2013. The meetings confirmed that external evaluation of the project was of great importance. It was agreed that the quality of the workshops with intermediary groups and older people, the final conference in Hamburg, and the training programmes, including the pilots, will be evaluated using questionnaires for those participating. External experts will be involved in assessing the quality of the training materials and the booklet for intermediaries. For this purpose, each partner agreed to provide the names and details of a number of independent external experts who will become involved in the virtual professional networking to create the MATURE pan-European expert forum. This process is being managed by Partner 7 and is scheduled to take place by June 2014.

The quality assurance plan and evaluation strategy makes use of both qualitative and quantitative approaches. These include online questionnaires to gather feedback from the project partners; presentations and evaluation sessions at the partner business meetings; reviews of the project documentation and reports; individual interviews with project personnel from the partnership organisations; monitoring and evaluation of the process of the work in the work packages; questionnaires to gather feedback from participants in the workshops, conferences and training programme; assessment by the expert forum.

### **Dissemination, exploitation, sustainability**

Dissemination, exploitation and sustainability are key elements of the MATURE project. The consortium has sought to disseminate information about the project from the very outset and the dissemination work package runs throughout the duration of the project. The dissemination plan was discussed in detail at the kick-off meeting in Leicester and again at the meeting in Torun. The project devoted a good deal of time to consideration of target groups and how to reach them. The leader of work package 6 on dissemination is Partner 6, PRO-MED from Gdansk in Poland, and it is energetic and experienced in this field. The dissemination strategy was approved at the kick-off meeting and partners have since been active in putting it into effect.

The project is reaching its target groups and the wider public by using different forms of dissemination:

- Use of the MATURE website at <http://matureproject.eu>;
- Widespread circulation of the MATURE leaflet publicising the project;
- Targeted publicity through partners' activities in their own countries;
- Publication and circulation of four MATURE e-bulletins;
- Communications with organisations and groups working in later-life learning using circulation lists drawn from national networking and European contacts;
- Using the MATURE Facebook page <https://www.facebook.com/MatureProject?fref=ts>
- Publicity for the three workshops with intermediary groups and older learners;
- Press releases to reach other potentially interested groups and individuals;
- Promotion of the work of MATURE in appropriate journals and newsletters such as the *International Journal of Education and Ageing*;
- Publicity for the MATURE conference in Hamburg in September 2014;
- Giving out MATURE leaflets and information at a wide variety of other conferences, meeting and workshops.

In addition to the project flyer, the web site, and the Facebook page, the project's other methods of dissemination are also important, including the e-bulletins and other publications,

conferences and meetings, and emails and communications. These activities have required a lot of effort by members of the partnership and this is also true of work package 7 which is concerned with exploitation and sustainability. It runs from month 9 of the project (June 2013) until its end. Fortunately, this work package is also led by a member of the partnership who has considerable experience and expertise in this field – Partner 2: Bia-net, Graz, Austria.

The exploitation plan was produced by Partner 2 in June 2013 and was discussed and agreed at the business meeting in Torun. The network is focusing on mainstreaming and multiplying the results and outputs from the project and on sustainability. The MATURE exploitation plan highlights the need to build closer relationships with target communities and groups and outlines activities and a time plan.

Among the planned exploitation activities are:

- Attracting key participants, including those able to use MATURE products, to the final conference;
- Identifying and working closely with potential mainstreamers and multipliers of the project's approach and products;
- Establishing closer connections with other relevant projects and networks;
- Continuing to develop the web pages to highlight the project's outputs and their applications;
- Formatting the training programme content to enable it to be uploaded to the Grundtvig European training database, with members of the project being involved in the delivery of the course;
- Maintaining the MATURE web site for at least five years beyond the end of the project.

The partnership recognises that exploitation is closely related to dissemination but needs to ensure that the project results are not just available and visible – they also need to be used and to bring benefits to the different target groups and the wider community. The partners realise that exploitation is not easy. It involves increased interaction with potential users of the results of the project.

### 3. Project Outcomes and Results

The MATURE network has made good progress in its first 12 months. The work of the project is organised into seven work packages, three of which run throughout the life of the project. WP1 is the management of the partnership and this includes key activities such as the project handbook and web site. WP2 is 'implementation 1 – preparation' which lasted for the first year of the project, and entailed compiling a draft content guidance report and the MATURE guidance report, holding two transnational meetings, and drafting the face-to-face training and self-study guides. WP3 (months 12 to 16) is 'implementation 2 – production' and this involves piloting, evaluating and amending the training units and producing them in English, French and German.

WP4 (months 17 to 23) is 'implementation 3 – production' which includes publishing the training programmes and an online booklet in all partner languages, and holding a transnational conference to showcase the products. WP5 is 'quality assurance' which includes internal evaluations of the project and external assessments of the training materials. WP6 is 'dissemination' which also runs throughout the project. WP7 (months 9 to 24) is 'exploitation' which is concerned with the utility and sustainability of the project and its products. Each work package has its own list of deliverables, outputs and targets and these are closely monitored by the coordinators, work package leaders and the rest of the consortium.

#### Activities and progress

The main objectives for the management, administration and coordination of the project, set out in work package 1, have been delivered. Besides the development of the project's structures and working procedures, the project handbook and web site have been created and the minutes of the first two transnational meetings have been circulated. Evaluations by partners have been positive. Work package 2 has been completed. The main achievements have been the research undertaken to produce the draft content guidance report and the MATURE guidance report date (<http://matureproject.eu/research-report>), the organisation of two transnational business meetings and workshops for intermediary groups, the production of the face-to-face training programme and the draft self-study online training. All this activity proceeded smoothly and successfully and on time.

Work package 3, which began in month 12, is progressing well. This focuses on piloting and testing the face-to-face training in English and the online self-study materials in English, French and German. It will also entail a further transnational business meeting and public event, and production of an abstract for advice and guidance about the role of intermediary groups in the engagement of disadvantaged and excluded older people. Work package 4 is also concerned with implementation. It lasts from month 17 to month 24 and has not yet begun. It will include the publication of the face-to-face training and the self-study programme in each partner's language, the production of a booklet for intermediaries, the organisation of the final conference, a published report and the final MATURE business meeting.

#### Evaluations and quality assurance

Work package 5 focuses on quality assurance throughout the project. All the necessary paperwork was produced on time and the first evaluations took place on target. The results of the evaluations have been encouraging and positive. The report prepared by Partner 7 on the Leicester kick-off meeting stated that the evaluations showed clearly that the meeting

was 'highly successful' in all the areas covered, including preparation for the meeting, partners' involvement, the quality of what took place and the decisions reached. The report described it as 'a very successful meeting'. The assessment of the second business meeting was similarly upbeat with the quality report again saying it was 'very successful' and 'very constructive and fruitful' with very good preparation, and a clear and well-organised agenda. The evaluations of the two business meetings were complimentary about the management and progress of the project and about the implementation of the work plan. There were also some useful observations about how things could be improved and the coordinating team and work package leaders have amended working practices in light of these suggestions.

The meetings with intermediary organisations and older people, held in Leicester (7 February 2013) and in Torun (6 July 2013), were both evaluated by means of surveys. The online questionnaire for the Torun meeting was available in both English and Polish. The evaluation reports produced several pages of detailed individual comments about the meetings, the information that was imparted and its value. Partner 7 prepared a report on each event that showed they were successful and 'very effective' with many regarding the presentations as 'excellent'. There were also some suggestions for improvements which the partnership has incorporated into the planning of future events, especially the Hamburg conference.

Work package 6 is concerned with dissemination and work package 7 is about exploitation. All this work is on schedule. A great deal of dissemination has so far been undertaken. The corporate design for the MATURE network was approved at an early stage in the life of the project. This included agreement on the MATURE logo and the corporate colours. The project flyer was then designed and agreed. This includes sections on the goals of the project and its background, the benefits of later-life learning, the project's aims and outputs, activities and outputs, target groups and project dates.

The leaflet, which lists all the partners with their own logos and websites, has been translated into the languages of different countries involved in the network. It is available in electronic versions and also as a printed leaflet in English and has been sent to a large number of groups and individuals in the target groups. It has also been distributed at many conferences and meetings in various parts of Europe. The project has published two e-bulletins which have been circulated to target user communities. The web site is a major achievement (<http://matureproject.eu>) and will continue to be developed and populated with further information.

### **Initial impact**

The initial impact of MATURE was mainly through its promotional leaflet, which was circulated early in the life of the project – primarily via e-mail but also as printed copies which were sent through the post and given to participants at a variety of meetings. Another impact tool is the MATURE e-bulletin: individual dissemination activity reports by partners show that the publicity material has been sent to a wide variety of target groups. The information circulated about MATURE produced a number of requests from other networks, projects, programmes and partnerships to develop links and collaboration.

The data show that the project's web site has also had a positive initial impact with visitors from 16 separate countries. The Facebook site has over 140 'likes' showing that it is reaching a good number of people. The two workshops for intermediaries and older people also had noticeable impact with 65 attendees at the Leicester event and 33 present at the workshop in Torun. There has also been media interest in and coverage of the MATURE project and activities. The dissemination reports prepared by MATURE partners show the extent of the reach of the network – from local groupings of older people to participation in

pan-European, national, regional and local policy-making and cross-disciplinary activities. This rich variety indicates the potential for further impact during the second half of the project.

### **Challenges experienced by the network**

Fortunately the MATURE network has experienced relatively few difficulties which have needed management intervention and resolution or any serious changes to the work plans. One partner had to withdraw from the partnership at the outset because of changed circumstances and the other partners decided to seek a replacement. The new Greek partner, which joined the project on 27 November 2012, has good contacts and its networks, location and staffing are a good fit with the rest of the MATURE partnership. One other partner was affected by illness to a key member of staff and also staff restructuring which meant that there was a period of reduced activity by that partner. These problems have now been overcome.

There have been a few minor changes to the project schedule. For example, the publication of the *MATURE guidance report* was brought forward a few weeks to coincide with the launch of the web site, and the dates and location of the second transnational business meeting were slightly changed to coincide with two major educational conferences taking place in Torun at the start of July 2013 ([World Conference on Computers in Education](#) and [Informatics in Education](#) 2013). In addition, there have been some marginal changes to the timetable for the piloting and testing of the MATURE training programme as a result of a number of amendments the partnership decided to make to the face-to-face training units after detailed discussions when it met at the Torun business meeting. Other challenges that have been experienced relate to chasing progress with tasks, managing and increasing dissemination and enhancing impact, developing closer relations with target groups and communities, and prioritising exploitation and sustainability.

The MATURE partnership has adapted well to changes in circumstances and partners have shown they are flexible and willing to respond to changes when needed. There are generally high levels of co-operation between partners and a good sense of common purpose. The management of the project is demanding, with special efforts needed to make sure that communication is clear and effective, but the experience shows that this has paid dividends for the project which has made very good progress towards its objectives.

## 4. Partnerships

The MATURE partnership brings together the expertise and experience of partners from 8 different European countries. They have complementary skills, expertise and competences. MATURE has made very good progress during the first 12 months of the project and there are high levels of co-operation and a good sense of common purpose within the partnership.

### **Added value of being a multi-country partnership**

Later-life learning is a major focus of the work of the partners in this collaboration. Their involvement in this project stems from the belief that action is needed to tackle the barriers that inhibit the participation of many older people in later-life learning. The partners can achieve much more working together than a smaller group or individual organisations could manage.

The partners bring an array of skills and experiences to the project. These include: experience with research communities and academics; intergenerational working; understanding of active and healthy ageing and learning; knowledge of equality issues; expertise on learning and technology; the provision of training; organisation of conferences and meetings; work on the empowerment of older people; research skills and methods; engagement in teacher training and age awareness; collaborating with older people's organisations and groups; liaising with different providers of learning opportunities; and providing learning opportunities for older people. No single organisation could bring such a wealth of knowledge and experience and so together the partnership is much bigger than the sum of its parts.

The project is strengthened by the European knowledge and experience of individual partners. The partnership draws on knowledge of many previous European initiatives and partners are currently involved in others. This cumulation of information about a range of other projects is evidence of the added European value of the MATURE consortium. Further outcomes showing the value of this European partnership include:

- Increased recognition of European research, policy and practice through the project's links with scientific research and peer-reviewed journals.
- Networking and partnership building in later-life learning by promoting best practice in this field through the MATURE web site, e-bulletins and training products.
- The added value of different European approaches, histories, traditions and ways of operating, and the effects of different cultures, attitudes and beliefs on later-life learning.

The MATURE partnership also has a significant geographical reach with partners from 8 different countries stretching from the UK to Slovenia and the Poland to Portugal. Single countries would not be able to address these issues with such effectiveness and transferability. European collaboration is essential for achieving the aims of the MATURE network.

### **Experience of working together in a European partnership**

The individual members of the MATURE network have experience of previous working in European partnerships. Most members of the partnership have worked together on four previous projects in this field. These are: *Learning in Senior Age* (LISA), *Learning: A*

*Response to Ageing* (LARA), *Learning in the Post-Professional Phase* (LENA), and *EU Broadening People's Minds In Ageing* (EuBiA). These projects investigated the benefits of, and obstacles to, later-life learning and confirmed that the nature and place of learning for older learners is not fully understood at either strategic or operational levels.

The MATURE partnership builds on the previous experience of working together and the knowledge acquired during these previous projects. The past experiences of European project working have helped the MATURE team to develop quickly, build trust and confidence and engender common goals. The chosen language for communication within MATURE is English and all the partners are able to communicate with each other using the English language. Material is being translated into partners' own languages as the need arises. The experience of working together in a European partnership has been very positive.

### **Partnerships with groups outside the consortium**

Learning in later-life is a complex field. It encompasses many areas and is undertaken by older people in a range of venues from formal education centres to day-care and residential centres. There are potentially many partners in the field. Older people learn with different generations and among their own cohorts. Their 'teachers' may be educationalists, therapists, artists, trainers, care providers and themselves. Funding may come from various sources – for example, public, private, voluntary, charities, health and welfare, education, sports and leisure.

The MATURE network has established relationships with target user groups. It is also building partnerships with intermediary agencies and organisations, as well as with other projects and older people themselves, using means such as targeted communications, the e-bulletins, the web site and the workshops at the first three transnational meetings. MATURE partners have connections with a range of other partnerships, from local organisations of older learners to pan-European and national networks. Such connections bring benefits for MATURE itself as well as for those in the target groups. The MATURE consortium plans to continue to build these links and partnerships in the second half of the project. The final MATURE conference on older people and participation in learning will involve intermediary groups and older people and also European contacts and partners who are potential multipliers and mainstreamers of the products.



## 5. Plans for the Future

The MATURE project has passed the half-way point in good shape with all the significant milestones reached and overall progress on target. Plans are well-advanced for the second half of the project culminating in the launch of the project's products at the final conference in September 2014.

### Future plans on implementation

Work package 1 runs throughout the partnership and the coordinating team in Leicester will continue to manage the project using the quarterly reporting forms, completed by all partners, and other means such as updated task lists and activity calendars, reminders of deadlines, and the project handbook (updated in September 2013). The coordinators believe that close monitoring of activities and progress is important to keep the partnership on track. The UK team hold meetings every month to evaluate activities, monitor the finances and address any organisational issues. There are also regular meetings with the University's finance officers to ensure that EACEA rules are being correctly applied in accordance with the grant agreement and the individual partner's agreements. Further work will be undertaken on the MATURE web site with content and new products added so that it remains a comprehensive guide to and overview of the project. New information and news will be added to the Facebook pages.

Work package 2 has been completed and work package 3 is due for completion by February 2014. This entails the final translation of the self-study online units into French and German as well as English, and their pilot testing by four partners, and testing of the face-to-face training units by five partners. The results of the evaluations will be used to make amendments to the training units and the final versions will be agreed at the third transnational business meeting of the partnership in Switzerland in February 2014. Each partner will agree deadlines for translation of the units into its own country's language. Work will also be undertaken on preparing the content for the advice booklet *Why Learning Matters for Older Adults* for intermediary organisations. The third transnational meeting will include a workshop involving intermediary groups and older people at which the outline of the booklet will be discussed.

Work package 4 focuses on the production of the final training programme units and the advice booklet and their launch at the MATURE conference on older people and participation in learning. The translations of the training materials will be completed and the draft booklet will be externally evaluated, amended in light of the feedback and then translated into partners' languages. All the finished units and the booklet *Why Learning Matters for Older Adults* will be uploaded on to the web pages. The partnership intends to devote time and effort to planning the conference and inviting members of key target groups to attend and participate.

A variety of means will be used to reach a wide range of mainstreamers and multipliers as well as teachers and trainers, intermediary groups and older people themselves. These will include direct invitations to groups and individuals on partners' contact lists, links with other networks and projects, email notifications, e-bulletins, and the use of social media and the web site. The evaluation of the final conference will capture the comments and views of participants for inclusion in a report of the conference which will also include the keynote presentations and conference proceedings. This written report will be uploaded to the web site to add to the body of knowledge that underpins the project and the training programmes.

### **Plans for quality assurance, dissemination and exploitation**

Work package 5 runs throughout the span of the project and is concerned with evaluation and quality assurance. During the second year this work package will include further assessment of the way the partnership operates and of the transnational meetings, evaluation of the project's activities, training units and advice booklet, and of the final conference. The work package will include the use of a panel of experts to assess the principal products and outputs.

Work package 6 is about dissemination. The consortium will invest further efforts to raise awareness of the project, and its activities and outputs, through the web pages, further distribution of the project flyer, e-mails, e-bulletins, social media, attendance at events and meetings, and by other means. All the partners will continue to add to the four contact lists which MATURE is developing: general contacts in this field; training contacts, experts and teacher support; intermediary organisations; EU/national linked projects and networks. Partners will also continue to publicise MATURE at events and conferences they attend, and to draw the attention of different media and other projects to the work of the project. Two further e-bulletins will be produced and circulated.

Work package 7 is about exploitation and sustainability. The partnership will implement its exploitation strategy which was discussed at the Torun meeting and will work to achieve effective communication with mainstreamers and multipliers about the project's products. The web pages on 'MATURE and you' will be developed further and a post-project sustainability strategy will be developed. The partnership will submit a training programme using the MATURE materials to the Grundtvig European training database and will be involved in delivering the course after the project end. By this means the team plans to take the MATURE training products to new European audiences and to cascade the training at national levels supported by access to the variety of related information and advice on the web site.

The MATURE goal is to find effective ways to address the training needs of adult education practitioners in respect of reaching, engaging and motivating older adults who do not readily participate in learning. The plans for the second year of the partnership aim to realise this objective by completing production and delivery of the project's key products.

## 6. Contribution to EU policies

Europe needs to respond to the challenges and also the opportunities associated with the changing demographic structure in Europe and the ageing of the population. Learning for older people offers a cost-effective way to meet those challenges and to grasp the opportunities. However, the evidence shows that many older people do not participate in adult education and there is a great deal to be done to overcome age-related barriers. In this respect, the MATURE network and its activities have an important contribution to make to EU policies, objectives and priorities.

### European objectives and priorities

European policies have highlighted the need for improved adult learning opportunities. In its resolution entitled *It is never too late to learn*, passed on 16 January 2008, the European Parliament urged member states 'to promote the acquisition of knowledge and to develop a culture of lifelong learning'. At its meeting in March 2008, the European Council noted the need to plan for future skills requirements in view of factors such as the ageing population. In May 2008, the European Council's conclusions from its meeting on adult learning were clear on the need for greater investment in lifelong learning. The Council and the representatives of the governments of the member states met in Zaragoza in April 2010 and in their conclusions on *Integration as a Driver for Development and Social Cohesion* they reinforced the view of the value of education: 'education is undoubtedly an essential element in the EU's fight against social exclusion and discrimination'. MATURE aims to take this thinking forward and to find ways to increase the involvement of older people in learning activities.

### The MATURE contribution

The MATURE project is contributing to EU policies, objectives and priorities in the field of lifelong learning, older people and the ageing population. It is also responding to European priorities such as intergenerational solidarity and learning, social cohesion, active ageing and overcoming exclusion and providing connections with later-life learning. In terms of the objectives of the Lifelong Learning Programme, MATURE builds on the work of four previous Grundtvig projects disseminating and exploiting their results and outputs. The partnership is promoting learning specifically tailored to the needs of older adults and is responding to the educational challenges of the ageing population in Europe.

MATURE is helping to provide ways of enabling older people to improve their knowledge and competences by providing continuing professional development for practitioners so they can tailor content and delivery to the needs of older people. In this way the partnership aims to facilitate the development of innovative practices in adult education. MATURE focuses on making the transfer of good practice for later-life learning a reality. It is designed to extend the reach and application of innovative teaching and to equip older people with skills for independence and also for intergenerational learning. It will also strengthen social inclusion and contribute to combating age discrimination.

Older people are a marginalised learning cohort and a key participation target group – new approaches are needed to reach and engage them in learning that contributes to their social inclusion and well-being and brings benefits to their families, communities and the wider society. This is what the MATURE project is seeking to achieve.

## 7. MATURE project partners

Web site: <http://matureproject.eu>

*Project coordinator:*

Institute of Lifelong Learning, University of Leicester, United Kingdom

Web site: [www.le.ac.uk/lifelonglearning](http://www.le.ac.uk/lifelonglearning) Email: [jl172@le.ac.uk](mailto:jl172@le.ac.uk); [jtb2@le.ac.uk](mailto:jtb2@le.ac.uk)

*Partners:*

AidLearn, Lisbon, Portugal [www.aidlearn.com](http://www.aidlearn.com)

Bia-net – Netzwerk Bildung im Alter, Graz, Austria [www.bia-net.org](http://www.bia-net.org)

Hamburger Volkshochschule, Hamburg, Germany [www.vhs-hamburg.de](http://www.vhs-hamburg.de)

50plus Hellas, Athens, Greece [www.50plus.gr](http://www.50plus.gr)

PRO-MED sp. z o.o., Gdansk, Poland [www.pro-med.org.pl](http://www.pro-med.org.pl)

Verband der Schweizerischen Volkshochschulen/Association des Universites Populaires Suisses, Bern, Switzerland [www.up-vhs.ch](http://www.up-vhs.ch)

ZDUS (Zveza društev upokojencev Slovenije), Ljubljana, Slovenia [www.zdus-zveza.si](http://www.zdus-zveza.si)

University of Leicester, UK [www.le.ac.uk](http://www.le.ac.uk)



