

Results of quality assurance and evaluation of project implementation and dissemination activities

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Introduction

In the 3LoE project a distinction is made between

- a) quality assurance and evaluation of the development and implementation of all educational measures
- b) Quality assurance and evaluation of the development of Centers of vocational Excellence, collaborations and international cooperation
- c) Quality assurance and evaluation of the Implementation of the project, collaboration in the project consortium and of the result transfers and implementation consulting

Quality assurance and evaluation of educational measures occur in the Work Packages, in which qualifications were developed, tested and implemented (WP 2 to 5). The results are shown in the results of all educational measures.

Quality assurance and evaluation of the development of Centers of vocational Excellence, collaborations and international cooperation occur in Work Package 2 "Development and permanent operation of regional centers of excellence". The concept and results are presented in Result 2.2 Three-level centres of professional excellence "Green Economy for SMEs" and transnational platform - Part C Results and Business Models.

Quality assurance and evaluation of the Implementation of the project, collaboration in the project consortium and of the result transfers and implementation consulting is the subject of the work in Work Package 6 Quality Management. The concept and results are presented in Result 6.2 Result report of all evaluations and assessments.

The results of the quality assurance and evaluation of the Implementation of the project, collaboration in the project consortium and of the result transfers and implementation consulting are summarised below.

Evaluation results of the transfers, implementations and project realisation

1. Data sources and evaluation criteria

For the evaluation of the project implementation the following data sources were used:

1. Project application of the lead partner
2. Activity Plan
3. Written surveys of participants of every workshop and events
4. Online survey of all project partners
5. Detailed interviews with all project partners as well as separate transfer recipients (sample)
6. Intellectual outputs developed during the project

Interim results of the evaluation were continuously included in the implementation of further work, so that a continuous process of learning and improvement was achieved during the project implementation. The overall results are listed below.

Concerning the evaluation criteria which must be used in relation to the evaluated processes the opinions in the scientific literature diverge strongly. Often it is recommended to use checklists which contain up to 100 and more criteria according to which the processes can be evaluated.

To ensure the practicability of the evaluation but nevertheless to assess the results thoroughly the evaluation of the project implementation concentrated on four criteria.

1. The quality and the efficiency of management
2. The communication and the cooperation in the project consortium
3. The involvement of transfer recipients and transfer activities
4. The expected benefits of products developed within the framework of the project

According to international experiences with evaluation which are available first of all in the English-speaking countries a holistic (integral) evaluation of processes should have the priority.

During the evaluation of the registered data the focus was on the following criteria:

- How do project partners assess the cooperation in consortium and the project management of the lead partner?
- Have the expectations of the project partners been met?
- Did the management meet the requirements?
- How do transfer recipients assess their involvement and the transfer activities?
- What benefits do the developed products have for the project partners and the transfer recipients?

2. Evaluation results of the transnational Project Partner Meetings

A standardized survey was conducted during the transnational project partner meetings. As a survey instrument, a questionnaire was created with statements that can be accepted or rejected by the respondents with a higher or lower consent

according to the given multi-level response scale. This method made it possible to form the first impression, a sketch, a tendency to satisfaction and the opinions of the respondents. The individual answers were later discussed in detail in individual interviews.

Eight workshops with personal presence of all project partners and experts were planned in the project, but unfortunately only seven workshops could be realized due to the Corona Pandemic:

- on 08. – 09.10.2021 in Panevezys, Lithuania
- on 20. – 21.05.2022 in Vienna, Austria
- on 21. – 22.10.2022 in Rome, Italy
- on 10. – 11.05.2023 in Barcelona, Spain
- on 23. – 24.11.2023 in Szczecin, Poland
- on 15. – 16.04.2024 in Hamburg, Germany
- on 04. – 05.09.2024 in Riga, Latvia

Due to the corona pandemic online meetings with all partners was held on:

- 07.12.2020
- 12.03.2021
- 07.06.2021
- 09.03.2022
- 20.09.2024

Accordingly, an evaluation of the seven project meetings took place.

The workshops usually lasted 1 or two days and were always accompanied by an additional joint evening event to promote communication and exchange of experience. The dates for all workshops were set at the start of the project in consultation with all partners.

The lead partner invited all partners to the workshops six weeks in advance in writing with a detailed agenda and sent out prepared project materials to be discussed together. Moreover, the lead partner prepared a detailed presentation for each workshop, which was then sent to all partners together with the workshop minutes after the meeting.

In addition to the workshops with all partners also a great number of workshops with 2 – 3 partners were organized, where individual questions to implementations were discussed.

The written evaluation of the workshop included 20 topics related to the preparation and the conduct of the workshop, the communication in consortium and the management of the lead partner. For each topic the participants could choose between five answer categories

- strongly agree
- agree
- neither agree nor disagree

- disagree
- strongly disagree

Participants also had the opportunity to make suggestions for cooperation within the consortium, the implementation of the project and the organization of the workshop. However, this possibility was rarely used.

Below, an example of a written workshop feedback form is attached. The workshop feedback forms were identical for all workshops to record possible changes on the statements during the project lifetime.



Hanse-Parlament

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WORKSHOP FEEDBACK FORM OF THE PROJECT
“3LoE” 15. & 16. APRIL 2024

Please indicate by ticking the scale that applies to your opinion on the following aspects of the project workshop.

	Strongly agree	Agree	Neither agree nor disagree	Disagree	Strongly disagree
The Lead Partner (LP) sent the information on the workshop in due time					
The information on the workshop: agenda, venue, hotel, etc. is satisfactory					
All project partners were involved in planning the workshop, e. g. setting the date, time, etc.					
The communication with the LP is reliable and supportive					
In general, communication with each other (between the partners) is smoothly					
The topics on the agenda were transparent					
There was devoted enough time for every topic					

All partners were involved in making decisions and action during the workshop					
Everyone who has wished, got a chance to speak, discuss, share own opinion					
The planned total time for the workshop was satisfactory					
In the framework of the workshop was enough time planned to communicate with each other					
All in all, the working atmosphere was good during the workshop					
The premises, lighting, technique, etc. of the workshop were satisfactory					
The time management like punctuality, effectiveness, etc. of the workshop is good					
After the workshop I am well informed about the common further steps in the project (appointments, meetings, etc.)					
After the workshop I know very well what my individual tasks in the future are					
All questions I had before the workshop were clarified during the workshop					
Carrying out the workshop together with other events for reasons of time and cost saving and experience exchange with others from different countries is particularly positive aspect					
The organization of hotel, joint lunch/dinner and catering is good					
It is good to receive information about other projects, acquisitions and funding possibilities during the workshop					

Do you have any suggestions to improve and strengthen cooperation in the consortium, project implementation, and organization of the project workshops?

Thank you!

Almost 90 % of all participants strongly agree with all topics of the survey and 10 % agree. During the survey, only one participants of a workshop did not agree on the statements to the time management.

The participants rated the following statements as particularly positive, a large proportion of whom were rated as "strongly agree":

- Timely and comprehensive information by the lead partner
- Involvement of all the partners in discussions, consultations and during decision-making
- Very good working atmosphere
- Good communication with the lead partner and other partners
- Satisfactory spatial and technical conditions
- Good organization and conduct
- Very good information about other current projects and planned new projects

The following statements were largely valued with "consent":

- All project partners were involved in planning the workshop
- The planned total time for the workshop was satisfactory
- All questions I had before the workshop were clarified during the workshop

Over the course of time, the evaluation results have changed only slightly. The management, organization and implementation of the project, information, and communication as well as the execution of workshops are evaluated very positively and show only marginal starting points for improvements.

3. Evaluation results of the international Conferences

Four international consultation and dissemination conferences were held, in which project and associated partners, companies, representatives from politics and administrations and other stakeholders took part. The conferences lasted half a day to a full day and were supplemented by a half-day workshop with the project and associated partners to discuss and evaluate conference results, present and discuss interim and final results of the project, discuss transfer activities and prepare and advise on implementation in working groups.

- First conference on 07.10.2021 in Panevezys, Lithuania, with 81 participants at the conference and 35 participants at the workshop
- Second conference on 18. & 19.05.2022 in Vienna, Austria, with 57 participants at the conference and 50 participants at the workshop
- Third conference on 15. & 16.06.2023 in Budapest, Hungary with 81 participants at the conference and 44 participants at the workshop
- Fourth conference on 05.09.2024 in Riga, Latvia, with 103 participants

The written evaluations led to very positive results:

- ✓ The suitability of the venue's facilities was rated "excellent" by more than 90 % of the participants and "very good" by almost 10 %.
- ✓ Refreshment breaks and lunch were rated somewhat less positively.
- ✓ The outstanding importance of the conference theme was emphasised by almost all participants and predominantly rated as "excellent".
- ✓ 80 % of the participants stated that the topics were presented in a particularly interesting way (excellent). 20 % of the participants answered this question with "good" or "very good".
- ✓ For more than 95% of the participants, the results and materials presented were "very relevant and helpful".
- ✓ The conferences as a whole were exclusively rated "excellent" or "very good".
- ✓ None of the participants gave a rating of "fair" or "poor" to any of the questions asked.

4. Online survey of project partners

In this case, it is a partially standardized online survey. The online questionnaire is a newer, more modern method than paper, telephone or face-to-face surveys. The positive aspect of this form of written questionnaire is that it is quick and easy to implement, e.g., respondents can decide for themselves when to complete the questionnaire and there is no time pressure to answer questions. With online surveys, time and costs are saved and immediate availability of data is possible. For example, the free internet tool Survey Monkey, in which the questionnaire was completed, automatically summarizes the answers to each question and displays them graphically.

4.1 Written evaluation in the first year of the project

In the following, the results of the first online survey conducted between December 2021 and February 2022 are presented. An online survey was created that was shared with the project coordinators.

21 people responded to the feedback survey.

1. General Assessment

	ABSOLUTELY AGREE	SOMEWHAT AGREE	NEITHER AGREE NOR DISAGREE	SOMEWHAT DISAGREE	ABSOLUTELY DISAGREE	TOTAL	WEIGHTED AVERAGE
The TTT met my expectations.	57.69% 15	30.77% 8	3.85% 1	3.85% 1	3.85% 1	26	1.65
The TTT was useful for my work.	53.85% 14	30.77% 8	11.54% 3	0.00% 0	3.85% 1	26	1.69
I would recommend this training course.	53.85% 14	15.38% 4	26.92% 7	0.00% 0	3.85% 1	26	1.85

2. Content and Methods

	FULLY AGREE	SOMEWHAT AGREE	NEITHER AGREE NOR DISAGREE	SOMEWHAT DISAGREE	DISAGREE	TOTAL	WEIGHTED AVERAGE
The content of the TTT was interesting and informative.	53.85% 14	34.62% 9	3.85% 1	3.85% 1	3.85% 1	26	1.69
The methods of the TTT were suitable.	65.38% 17	15.38% 4	11.54% 3	3.85% 1	3.85% 1	26	1.65
The training contents were relevant to my needs.	42.31% 11	26.92% 7	15.38% 4	11.54% 3	3.85% 1	26	2.08
I expect to use the knowledge and skills gained from this training.	53.85% 14	23.08% 6	19.23% 5	0.00% 0	3.85% 1	26	1.77

3. Lecturers/Trainers

	FULLY AGREE	SOMEWHAT AGREE	NEITHER AGREE NOR DISAGREE	SOMEWHAT DISAGREE	DISAGREE	TOTAL	WEIGHTED AVERAGE
The lecturers/trainers were communicative, friendly and approachable.	76.92% 20	19.23% 5	3.85% 1	0.00% 0	0.00% 0	26	1.27
The lecturers/trainers were goal- and result-oriented.	65.38% 17	23.08% 6	11.54% 3	0.00% 0	0.00% 0	26	1.46
The lecturers/trainers were competent and well prepared.	76.92% 20	23.08% 6	0.00% 0	0.00% 0	0.00% 0	26	1.23
The lecturers/trainers responded well to questions and queries from the participants.	65.38% 17	26.92% 7	3.85% 1	3.85% 1	0.00% 0	26	1.46

4. Organization

	FULLY AGREE	SOMEWHAT AGREE	NEITHER AGREE NOR DISAGREE	SOMEWHAT DISAGREE	DISAGREE	TOTAL	WEIGHTED AVERAGE
The overall organization was good.	80.00% 20	16.00% 4	4.00% 1	0.00% 0	0.00% 0	25	1.24
The overall atmosphere of the train-the-trainer was good.	88.00% 22	12.00% 3	0.00% 0	0.00% 0	0.00% 0	25	1.12
The training venue and environment was comfortable and conducive to the learning process.	60.00% 15	20.00% 5	16.00% 4	0.00% 0	4.00% 1	25	1.68
The duration of the training was appropriate.	65.38% 17	23.08% 6	7.69% 2	3.85% 1	0.00% 0	26	1.50
Overall, I am very satisfied with the training and would recommend it to other counsellors.	65.38% 17	19.23% 5	15.38% 4	0.00% 0	0.00% 0	26	1.50

5. Other remarks

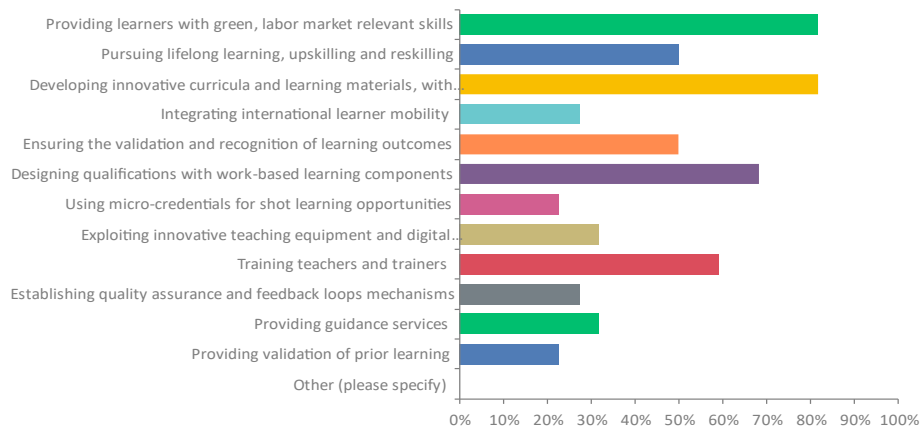
- Frankly, I didn't expect the training to be so interactive, interesting and useful. Huge thanks to the hosts! Great job! Waiting to meet everyone in Vienna!
- The inputs collected are many and highly interesting. grounding the results, proposing predeveloped tools to be applied to the COVEs could help to make the inputs concrete. At national level there is a risk of watering down the inputs too much and not getting results. Thank you for the wonderful atmosphere, focused and relaxed at the same time...human relations are the most important things. I agree.
- Congrats to Austria for the nicely organized seminar!

4.2 Written evaluation in the third year of the project

The second anonymous survey of all project partners took place around two years after the first survey with an unchanged questionnaire in order to visualize changes in the evaluations over time. All project partners took part in this survey with a total of 25 respondents.

Q4: What teaching and learning activities does your CoVE work on? (multiple responses possible)

Answered: 22 Skipped: 3

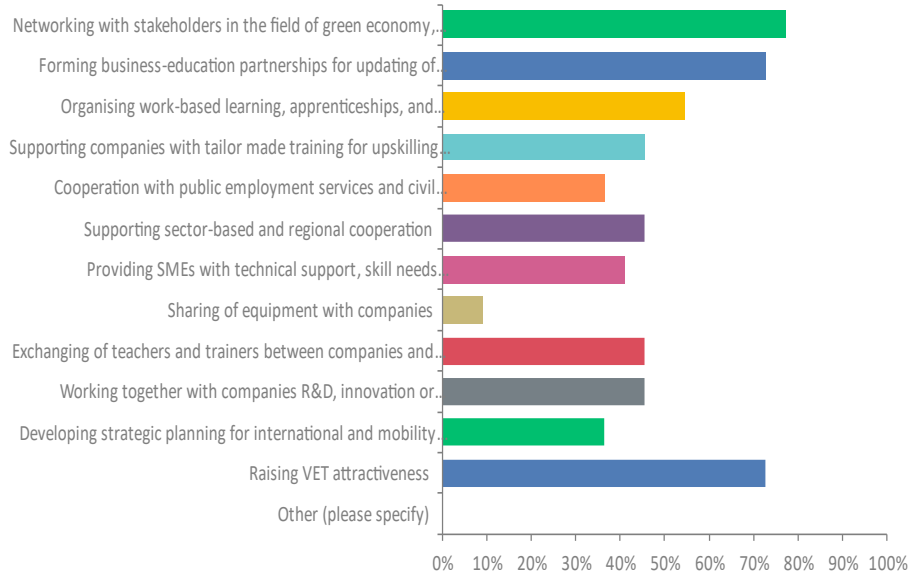


In their entirety, the eight COVEs cover all vocational education and training tasks at EQF levels 3 to 6.

They also fulfil all the tasks of a COVE. Networking with stakeholders in the field of green economy, business education partnerships and raising VET attractiveness are particularly strong (over 70%).

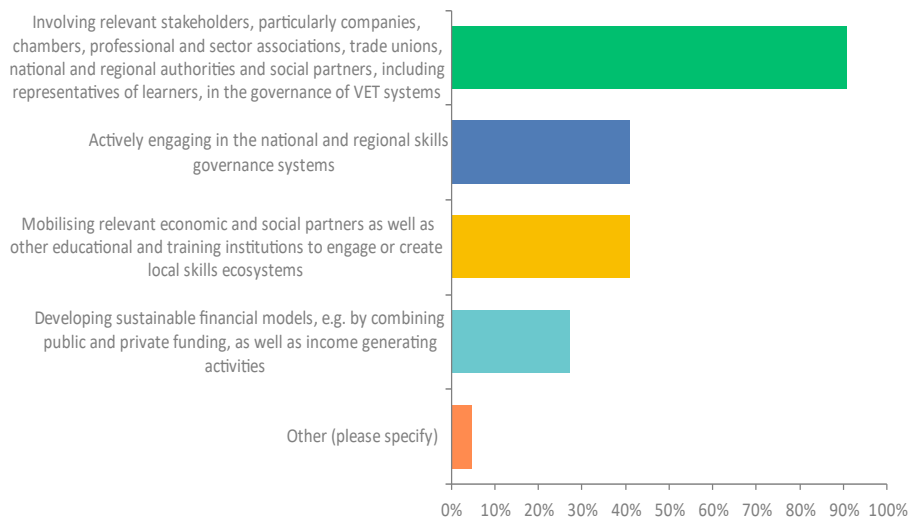
Q5: What cooperation and partnership activities does your CoVE work on? (multiple responses possible)

Answered: 22 Skipped: 3



Q6: What governance and funding activities does your CoVE work on? (multiple responses possible)

Answered: 22 Skipped: 3



Similar to the first survey, around 80 % of the project partners stated that the complexity of the 3LOE project tasks is suitable, while for around 15 % they are still complicated.

Also largely unchanged over time is completing the 3LOE project activities according to the schedule? While 70 % adhere to the work and time schedules, 30 % experience delays.

As in the first survey, 90 % of the project partners have been able to give their full contribution to 3LOE project tasks they are involved in, 10 % could not.

Unchanged from the first survey, all but one of the other project partners are still of the opinion that the frequency of project meetings is good and sufficient.

All project partners are convinced that they have sufficient resources to complete the project tasks and that all tools for cooperation and dissemination are available.

While three project partners stated in the first survey that they did not have enough information about the objectives of the COVE, their role and the role of the other partners in the respective regional COVE, all partners now feel very well informed.

The assessment of cooperation in the COVEs has improved over time. 80% of partners now rate it as very good and excellent, 20% as average.

The assessment of international cooperation and the exchange of experience has improved significantly over time. 85% of partners now rate these as very good and excellent and only 15% as average.

During the course of the project, all COVEs have firmly integrated other institutions (chambers, universities, vocational training organizations, etc.) into the work of the COVEs. With the exception of one partner, all other partners are now convinced that all relevant institutions are involved in the COVE work. With the exception of one partner, all other partners are of the opinion that the objectives of COVE are clear and well defined and that there is no reason to change the concept and structure of COVE.

All partners rate the quality of activities implemented on initial dual vocational training, further vocational training, higher education and on promoting innovation as good or excellent.

For a large number of project partners, the 3LOE project implemented:

- a) dual vocational training was introduced.
- b) further vocational training was greatly expanded and geared towards the needs of the world of work.
- c) dual Bachelor's degree programs were implemented for the first time.
- d) started to promote innovation and the realization of R&D projects for SMEs.
- e) significantly improved the quality of training and support programs.

To summarize, the second survey of the project partners resulted in extremely positive assessments of the structure and work of the eight COVEs. It is also particularly noteworthy that it was possible to complete the partner structure of the individual COVEs in the course of the project and to organize excellent cooperation within the individual COVEs and international cooperation. All project partners are clearly in favor of continuing the collaboration and confirm that the continuation of the eight COVEs after the end of the project is assured.

5. Interviews¹

The interview related to key questions is also called guideline-based interview that means, a set of questions is prespecified by the interviewer before the interview. However, this set of questions should give a guideline through the interview and not kind a strict order, so the interview is more of a fluent, relaxed conversation by freely and openly answering questions. This method makes it possible to act less strictly than with other survey methods, so he / she conducts the interview considering the conversation flow, the set key questions or certain topics not considering the sequence of the questions, for example, or omitting some questions at all.

5.1 Interviews with Project Partners

An external expert conducted interviews with the 3LoE project partners. These interviews lasted between 30 and 40 minutes each. The interviews followed a generic set of questions but allowed also for free conversation to hear the partners' opinions. The interviews focused on the following topics:

- The quality and usefulness of the project outputs
- The involvement of and communication among the project partners
- The design and implementation of the project workshops
- The dissemination of project results
- The administration processes of the project.

1. Was the project important for you? Why did you take part in it?

There were a handful of reasons that the partners mentioned when they answered this question. The most important one was 1. the aim to connect or even integrate vocational training, further training and higher education – more than half the interviewees mentioned this as a reason to join 3LoE. Nearly half of the project partners mentioned that 2. the topic of the centres – i.e. sustainability/green skills, innovation and entrepreneurship were a major reason to join. About one third of the partners were hoping to 3. expand their international network through joining 3LoE. And about a quarter of the partners stated that 4. the Hanse-Parlament as lead partner was another factor why they were in favour of joining the 3LoE project.

We wanted to establish international networks and benefit from the international exchange of experience. In addition, the topics of this project are very attractive - we want to strengthen sustainability in education and training. As a third goal, we want to increase permeability between non-academic and academic educational pathways. In addition, the Hanse-Parlament is an excellent lead partner that we already know from other projects.

This project is fundamental for us as a very small university. 3LoE is a big project with a lot of partners from seven countries – this network is

¹ Done by Philipp Jarke, Graz & Bremen

important for us. Another major factor is the dual system of education, which is part of the programme – we did not have dual programmes before. We wanted to establish this at our university.

The goal of linking academic and vocational education is extremely important to us. And this project brings together the representatives of all three branches of education to work on something together.

2. In the 3LoE project, Centres of Vocational Excellence were established in each country by vocational schools, further education institutions of the business sector and universities.

Is the integration of all three levels - vocational education and training, further education and higher education - beneficial? What are the advantages and disadvantages?

In most of the project partners' countries, the three levels of education have so far been largely isolated from each other - there is little cooperation between institutions, little to no understanding of each other's concerns (and sometimes little respect for each other's achievements), and learners find the transition from one level to the other difficult. According to the project partners, the centres can help to build bridges across these divides.

Another advantage of such centres, some project partners said, is that graduates can gain valuable practical experience by combining the academic and vocational levels. This increases their job prospects and companies benefit from young employees who can be integrated into work processes more quickly.

However, one project partner pointed out that the interlinking of the vocational and academic levels of education has (narrow) limits - quality standards must be observed, which is also relevant for in the accreditation of study programmes and degrees.

In Latvia we are trying to align all levels or pathways of education – alignment means that all levels of education are connected, and you can move from one pathway to another. This allows people to grow constantly, to learn for their entire life.

The integration of the three levels in one centre is very useful. The centre creates a skill-based ladder that people can progress on. The integration ensures that the programmes at each level do not repeat too much of the content provided by the “lower” level already.

It is very useful because it improves the interconnection of all educational pathways. Each level of education becomes less isolated. It becomes easier to jump from one path to the others.

Combining vocational and academic education in one place offers high efficiency gains! Learners benefit from both branches at the same time - as a result, graduates of the academic branches have gained valuable hands-on experience and do not have to go through a trainee programme in the companies for one or two years first.

A real integration of the three levels is very difficult: The recognition and crediting of qualifications from a lower level for higher levels of education does not work well in practice. We have to respect and adhere to quality standards in this respect. If you have a vocational qualification in a certain subject, you cannot skip entire semesters in a related degree programme. Only individual modules can be credited. We don't want to gloss over this issue.

How do you benefit from the cooperation in these centres? What perspectives do you see for future development?

The project partners are already benefiting in many ways from the cooperation in the centres:

- They have expanded their network of cooperation partners and also put it on a sustainable basis. Participating chambers of crafts, trade and commerce report that they benefit from the close cooperation with colleges and universities. They can and want to use this experience to start additional cooperations with other colleges and universities.
- Through the close ties and cooperation between different partners in the individual centres, the target group of the participating educational institutions has grown: 1. The centres pool a broader range of educational offers, 2. synergies have been created between the partners, 3. theory and practice have moved closer together, and 4. the transition from one branch of education to another is made easier. All this increases the attractiveness of the educational offers.
- On a conceptual/political level, 3LoE partners in countries where dual education is not yet established and who want to change this, benefit from the centres. In these cases, the centres are a flagship that can be used to promote the acceptance of dual education programmes.

Our professional network has grown via this cooperation! This is very useful in practice: For example, the partner responsible for further education is helping us a lot to find SMEs as cooperating partners.

We benefit a lot from our partners in the centre. They are crucial for the implementation of the dual education system which we did not have before at our university. We use the 3LoE centre as a badge to promote the development of similar centres in other fields. The work and success in 3LoE is a showcase to convince other potential partners that such a system/structure is feasible and worthwhile.

We benefit because the target group for the training and further education we offer and for the degree programmes at the University of Applied Sciences, of which we are the main shareholder, increases through the centre.

The interlinking of vocational training and academic education will be strengthened. This is especially important for the students who

participate in the educational programmes. They benefit most when the places of learning and the actors at all levels come together to combine theory and practice and strategically establish this.

We get new students that have graduated from vocational schools. And we are already sharing lectures and partners, and the cooperation with chambers is intensifying.

We may build upon the experience we gain in this project and establish contacts to other universities – e.g. cooperations with technical universities.

The centre offers us the opportunity to attract new potential students among the young people associated with the other pillars of the centre.

We are initiating a cooperation with the university. University lecturers offer lectures for our pupils – the benefit obviously is additional knowledge. The goal is that our pupils can earn credit points that they can use when they go to university later in their career.

How effective is the coordination and cooperation in your centre so far?

The vast majority of the project partners reported that the cooperation in their centres is working very well: The partners have a common goal, are actively working together and meet regularly. About one fifth of partners that were interviewed stated that the coordination and cooperation in their centres was not yet working well: the reason for this were different “cultures” in the organisations, change in staff, or the geographical distance between the partners.

It is really effective. We know the partners in our centre from the past, they have built very professional teams with whom we have regular meetings, online and in person.

The cooperation works very well. The lead partner of our centre does a marvellous job! We help each other with our different sets of skills. We for example have helped the other centre partners with our language skills when they needed assistance.

The coordination in our centre is working really well! The leader is the education department of our regional government, they are experienced and professional. And the other partner, the vocational training centre Pere Martell, we know and cooperate with for many years. This makes the coordination very easy.

The cooperation works fine, we have established a monthly meeting of all members of our centre, and we are already planning to cooperate on lecturing young pupils who are between secondary school and the university.

The cooperation is very good. We know each other for a long time from earlier projects. The university is around the corner, and also to the third

partner we have personal relations. This helps a lot. We trust each other and can rely on each other.

At the moment we are not merging our three institutions all too much – the partners have specific tasks that they work on separately. The main goal is a common one, but we have different cultures and are in different geographical locations. This makes close cooperation challenging.

Sometimes it is hard because our organisations are so different (vocational school vs university) and the methodologies are different as well. We have to spend quite some time to align those different methodologies in order to make things work. But other universities involved in the other 3LoE centres have showed us how they are working in their centres. That has helped a lot.

The start into the project was difficult. The designated leader of our centre – a vet school – saw a significant change of staff. Therefore we as a Ministry stepped in as the leader. Our company partner was not very involved in the first part of the project but is ready to take action now.

What needs to be improved?

We have an idea to improve the cooperation and the mutual understanding of the different cultures and perspectives: We could have a rotation of responsibilities among the three CoVE partners. This way we would have to take the needs of the other partners into account more, and we could interact and understand each other's perspectives and needs more.

It would be better to have all three levels of a centre in one place, at least in one town.

How effective is the international cooperation between the seven centres of the project?

With a few exceptions, all project participants reported that the seven centres have barely cooperated with each other so far. The exchange has been limited to the large joint workshops and conferences organised by the lead partner. The reason mentioned by some partners for the low level of exchange is that the educational systems of the countries are too different to allow for intensive international cooperation.

On the other hand, many partners reported very good cooperation with individual, selected international 3LoE partners. The exchange in these cases refers both to the work in 3LoE as well as to parallel and future cooperation in other projects.

We haven't had much contact with the other centres yet. In theory, the idea of cooperation between the centres is very interesting. But will it take off? After all, the educational systems of the countries involved are very different, and the legal foundations of economic and environmental policy

are also different. Therefore, the transfer of educational offers in the fields is difficult.

There is no formal organised exchange between the centres. We have more informal contact with individual international partners and with the others at larger project meetings.

We have limited contact yet. But the project manager Melanie has put us in contact with several partners already during project meetings and we have shared a lot of experiences which was very useful. This helps us to gain new perspectives on the educational landscape in Europe.

So far the international networking is limited. We are cooperating closely with one Lithuanian partner with whom we have started another Erasmus project. But with the other centres as such there is hardly any exchange so far.

The main exchange happens at the Hans-Parlament workshops. It is very informative to learn about the experiences, curricula and working procedures of the other centres and how they deal with the educational regulations and governments and administrations. With the Italian partners we are planning to exchange of our trainers.

We meet regularly with the other international partners that operate the other centres. And we communicate with them on task-related issues, via phone or video conference. That works very well.

What needs to be improved?

Some project partners have ideas on how to improve the exchange between the centres: The exchange should be formalised, i.e. take place on a regular basis and be pre-structured. One idea in this regard was to form tandems among the centres - the group of partners would then be smaller, the partners more similar to each other, if necessary, and the exchange more purposeful and intensive.

Another suggestion was that the centres meet on very specific topics that concern all of them. This would give these meetings an added value for the participants, which would increase the motivation for a more intensive exchange.

There are a lot of partners in this project. Too many to have intensive contact with all of them. One idea to intensify the cooperation among international partners could be forming tandem partnerships – either among single organisations or among country groups. This way the cooperation could gain more depth and we could learn of each other more.

The exchange with the other centres could be strengthened, if necessary through formal requirements.

There should be an established exchange between the centres, but it should be pre-structured thematically so that there is a visible added

value for all participants at the respective meetings: We could talk about the political framework conditions in the respective countries and the adaptation of educational programmes to national conditions; about the didactic approach to interlinking of the educational pathways; about the institutional organisation of the centres. We could produce examples of best practice that the other partners use for orientation.

Maybe the lead partner could arrange extra meetings/workshops of smaller subgroups to discuss specific topics that are relevant not for all 3LoE partners but for a smaller number of partners. One idea for a subgroup would be further education providers who are interested in reforming the existing training programmes into a set of micro-segments (< 2 hrs each unit) – that is because many SME managers have told us that the topics of the training programmes are great and highly relevant, but the time that one needs to spend on them is way too long.

We have to meet more in person in the second half compared to the first years.

3. In the 3LoE project, the partners develop and implement a large number of programmes for vocational education and training, further education and higher education.

What do you think of the quality and specificity of these programmes? Is something missing?

All but one project partner are very happy with the quality of the educational programmes developed in 3LoE: The curricula and concepts are of high quality and relevant to the partners, their students and SMEs. Nonetheless, the programmes need to be adapted to the national/regional requirements, but many partners emphasised, that the 3LoE programmes offer great flexibility to make these amendments. One partner mentioned that the volume of the programmes is too high for further education purposes – SME staff is often short in time – further education programmes need to be adapted to that, e.g. through a modern structure (“micro-learning”).

The single partner that was dissatisfied with 3LoE’s educational programmes stated that most of the courses would simply replicate what they had already offered before, and/or that the concepts and presentations lack a lot of detail that needs to be added in the second half of the project.

The quality of the curricula and concepts is very good throughout.

The programmes are good, but we cannot use them for our purposes straight away. We need to adapt them to our needs. Because each country has its own specific goals and individual education system.

The degree programmes are all very good and of high quality, which is also a result of the Bologna criteria. Adaptations to the respective country specifics are of course necessary. What is still missing to some degree is the connection between the green economy and digitalisation. What effect

digitalisation has on the green economy is an important topic that we should look at more closely.

Every programme is of very high quality. And although they stem from different countries with different legal frameworks, they are very easy to adapt to our national needs. This flexibility is fantastic!

The topics are very important, green economy, resource efficiency, entrepreneurship - the programmes are very relevant for all companies! We have to adapt the programmes a bit, sometimes shorten them or leave parts out that are not relevant for our target groups, but in general the structure, curricula and teaching materials are very good and useful.

The quality of the programmes in general is good. But from our perspective as a company the structure, length and breadth of the programmes is not suitable for our targets. For further education we need programmes that are shorter or that are split into small packages that the participants can use and integrate into their work schedules. We call this Micro-learning. Time is extremely scarce in most SMEs, therefore we need to adapt the training programmes to the reality.

We have received some measures from other countries to test them. Some of these measures are not relevant for us, some of the contents are already covered by our existing education and training. Basically, a lot of work still needs to be put into the training measures. Often there are only few details in the concepts and presentations.

Which programmes are most important for you/your organisation? Have you already implemented any of them?

The most popular programmes are those that address topics related to green economy, i.e. energy/resource efficiency and renewable energy. Partners from Southern Europe were particularly interested in all programmes related to water efficiency and water management. Some university partners were interested in dual degree programmes, and chambers mentioned the train-the-trainer programmes. Additionally, many partners pick parts of the programmes and integrate them into their existing courses.

For us, the areas of circular economy and photovoltaics are particularly important – there is strong demand for this in the craft sector in our region.

Green skills are the most important.

New and very valuable for us are the programmes on renewable energy.

Green economy and digitalization are the most pressing issues for the Latvian vocational training schools.

All programmes related to water and water management are important for us.

The dual degree programmes are certainly most important to our university. But the problem is that dual degrees are not compatible with the Latvian legislation. And we cannot change the legislation in the short run. Therefore, we will have to adapt the programmes to the Latvian circumstances.

Most important for us are the train-the-trainer programmes for mentors in the companies. It is very important to have good mentors in the companies. And we have to repeat these programmes all the time because the staff of the companies is changing constantly – therefore new mentors are needed!

We take material or parts of curricula and use them for a wide range of programmes: from apprenticeship training to master classes to further education.

What are your plans for the educational programmes in the second half of the project?

All project partners are planning to implement more study/(further-)training programmes in their centres. Some of the partners will amend or even restructure some of their further training programmes according to their experiences and feedback from SMEs: these programmes will be shortened and more accessible for SME staff short in time.

We will develop new pilots for further education programmes at the NQR5 level with two new associated partners in other regions - to bridge the gap between level 4 and 6 (heating and installation technology, hairdressers, car mechanics, car body construction) and as a reaction to the demand on the market (technical project manager, motor vehicle damage assessor, motor vehicle high-voltage specialist).

We will switch our focus to the food, catering and hotel business. Sustainability in this sector is very important. We will have a joint programme with our partner in Vilnius on the Zero-Waste-Restaurant.

We are developing a Master's programme on sustainability and digitalisation - but it will not be accredited until the end of the project.

We want to implement a dual bachelor degree together with our university partner – but the Spanish Ministry of Education has to approve the proposal first.

We will introduce short trainings which will be targeted towards employees and managers of SMEs. But also teachers at schools – we see a big demand for sustainability trainings in the education sector.

We will not create new programmes, but will adapt the existing programmes to the targets of our customers, i.e. we will restructure them and try to create micro-learning programmes based on the existing curricula.

If a budget extension is approved, we will work with a cooperating research institution (Johanneum Research) to develop a basic sustainability course aimed at all population groups: Why is sustainability important and how is the economy and society affected by environmental changes and resource scarcity? Because in parts of the Austrian society there is a certain scepticism about this topic, so it is necessary to convey basic knowledge.

What do they see as the biggest challenges in vocational education and training, further education and higher education?

The answers to this question were wide-ranging, reflecting the different education systems, traditions and values in the project partners' countries.

A prominent topic was the divide between vocational training and higher education – there are several aspects to this, e.g. the low reputation of vocational training in the general society, higher education institutions looking down on vocational training, the difficulties for graduates of vocational training who would like to take up a study programme and would like to have previous knowledge recognised.

Several partners mentioned the lack of qualified teaching staff, or that the existing teaching staff is burning out because of high workloads, low pay and low prestige.

Some partners reported shrinking numbers of students at universities/colleges as well as a lack of interest in further training programmes.

There is no permeability between vocational training and academic education, or only with universities of applied sciences as an exception. Two separate cultures prevail, yet both are needed for excellence! Universities must open up to students from the vocational training sector, and at the same time we need more flexibility in initial vocational training. The possibility of combining this with a Bachelor's degree would be very important, especially since pure vocational training is very poorly regarded in parts of Austria. Therefore, we need good models to also get 18-year-olds who are strong learners into training.

In Catalunya one of the biggest challenges is the divide between higher education and work-based learning. These are almost two separate worlds. This needs to change to find sophisticated but applicable solutions for the social and environmental challenges we are facing. Cooperating between the vocational training sector and higher education institutions should be prioritised.

One major issue in Italy is the poor situation that teachers at schools are in: Their social reputation and their salaries are pretty low. At the same

time they have to work very hard and have to carry a very high bureaucratic burden. They have to invest a lot of their energy to tasks that do not concern the education of the children. The risk of burn-out is high but is not recognized.

We work in the vocational training level – which has changed to the better in the recent years! The number of students/trainees has grown – but there is a shortage of qualified teachers. Hand-in-hand with this goes the limited financial means in the vocational training sector.

There are several challenges: a lack of students, a lack of interest in vocational training and in further education. And there is a shortage in teachers – the teachers we have are overloaded.

It is very difficult to attract people to further training programmes. There is little demand - only less than 15 percent of the working population in Austria take part in further education. That is far too little. The reasons are lack of money, a certain arrogance, but above all a lack of time in the companies.

The number of people interested in vocational training is too low, at the same time we do not have enough teachers at the vocational training schools – many teachers are close to the end of their professional career. We need a new generation of teachers following them. Another problem is that not enough companies are willing to take part in work-based learning programmes (an equivalent to the dual vocational training in Germany).

4. Can and will you use the results of 3LoE for your work in the future (e.g.. curricula)?

All but one project partner are planning to use at least some 3LoE training/study programmes in the future or are already using these results. Some partners are implementing entire study programmes of further training programmes developed in 3LoE, others are using parts of the curricula or parts of the materials for their work.

The one (German) partner that is not planning to use 3LoE results stated that the programmes and materials were either not relevant for the craft enterprises in the region or were offered as part of the education portfolio before.

Yes, we can and will use the training programmes and materials for further trainings.

We can definitely use the results. We are governing a large group of vet schools that can use the programmes and materials developed in 3LoE.

Yes, we will use a lot of the study programmes and modules to integrate them into our portfolio. We have implemented some of the study programmes already and we will continue to do so.

The dual degree programmes are interesting. We will use them partly, as we have to adapt them to our legislation.

Yes, we want to continue offering the study programmes we are developing. We will also continue to use materials and modules from other educational programmes in our educational offers.

Up to now, no, because the measures developed are either not relevant for our craft enterprises (e.g. rainwater treatment) or these are already included in our existing programmes.

The most important result of the project for us is the experience gained from integrating the three levels of education in one centre. This is what we want to keep doing in the future. Therefore, the project results are very valuable for our future work.

5. What do you think about the communication between the project partners?

All project partners are very happy with the communication among the project partners – there is a positive, supportive spirit among the partners. One partner was mainly communicating with the lead partner so far and stated that the international communication should be intensified.

The communication is very smooth in the project. All partners are very supportive and friendly.

The communication is excellent. The personal interaction since the first face-to-face workshops has become much more intensive, which is also noticeable in the digital communication.

The exchange is great. Very intensive. There are always online conferences at short notice when needed. This also goes beyond the circle of project partners: one partner from Austria has brought in external cooperation partners who are interested in our work. That is very helpful!

It is very smooth. There are no problems at all. We get a lot of support from individual international partners! When we were negotiating with a university partner to join our Centre of Professional Excellence, the professor from the Polish university joined the video call and explained his perspective and the benefits as a university partner in the Polish Centre. This was very helpful. On the other hand we are offering our Latvian partner an exchange of students who can come to our universities.

The spirit is very inspiring and cooperative!

We communicate a lot with the lead partner, not so much with the other partners. The international communication and cooperation could be better.

How could the communication be improved?

There were only a few recommendations or ideas on how to improve the communication among the project partners, regarding the language barrier between international partners and the frequency and reliability of meetings between the partners.

Language skills on all sides would have to be improved.

In order to ensure a regular exchange, the lead partner could set up a meeting at the centre at least every eight weeks, including minutes.

We should communicate more on the programme – many partners are facing similar domestic issues and challenges that we could discuss with the other partners.

More face-to-face meetings might help.

6. Project workshops were held every six months to discuss tasks and project implementation.

In your opinion, is this sufficient? Are the time intervals between meetings adequate?

All partners were happy with the current workshop schedule.

It is good as it is.

That is appropriate. More workshops would not be good because of the amount of travel and time involved.

The workshops were mostly half-day; is there a need for change from your perspective: longer, shorter?

Opinions on this issue are very mixed. Many partners think that the length of the workshops so far is appropriate - this makes it possible to integrate the trips into the daily work routine. However, some of the partners would like longer workshops in order to have more time for informal meetings and discussions with other project partners, especially those from other countries.

Appropriate. Well planned by the lead partner.

Okay like it is. Longer workshops (additional days) are hard to synchronize with our work schedules.

The duration is perfect. It gives us the option to travel back home in the evening – and if you like, you can stay another day to work on any urgent issue with other partners or the lead partner. This flexibility is very good.

Longer, to have a chance to discuss with other partners and share their experience.

The schedules of the workshops have been extremely full. The meetings started early in the morning and lasted many hours. With very little time for informal meetings and free time to explore the cities together with the

project partners. This limits the chance to develop ties to international partners, built trust and develop ideas for further cooperation.

Is there enough time at the project workshops to communicate and discuss the individual points?

Most of the partners stated that there was enough time to discuss every subject of the agenda in detail. Some partners mentioned that the agenda of some workshops was too long, leaving not enough time for certain topics and not enough time between different topics to reflect on the discussions before moving on to the next topic.

Yes, all tasks and issues can be discussed.

Yes, the workshops are of high quality, many ideas are developed.

Yes, there is enough time for presentations and discussions. Also for informal meetings in between and in the evenings. The lead partner puts great emphasis on this.

I have only attended one workshop so far. In this workshop there was not enough time for deeper discussions of certain topics – in our case we would have liked to go more into detail how we can transform the structure/length of the training programmes in order to make them more attractive for further education of SME employees.

Usually there is enough time. Only the first workshop on the financial reporting was too short – there were so many questions of all partners that needed to be answered that the scheduled time was not enough.

The time between individual topics is often too short - there is no time to let the experience sink in and reflect on it. Instead, there is a completely different, important point in the agenda.

Are all partners sufficiently involved in the work at the project workshops?

All partners were happy with how everyone is usually engaging in the discussions during the workshops. The formats of the workshops consist of interactive elements to make sure everyone is getting involved.

Yes. We get the agenda in advance so that everyone can prepare for the discussions. And everyone can get involved at any time.

Yes, the agenda of the workshops requires the participation of all partners.

Yes. There are many interactive formats in the workshops, so that all partners get involved naturally.

The workshops are designed to be very interactive. There is no time for any partner to stare at their phones.

Sometimes people attend the workshops who were not involved in the operational work of the project - they are then passive, obviously. But that's fine. Overall, we have become a homogeneous group that is working well together.

Some workshops have had to be held online. How do you rate the online meetings? Can online meetings replace face-to-face meetings?

All partners are satisfied with the quality and results of the online workshops (although sometimes too long) – they said they are time- and cost-efficient, very suitable for shorter, intermediate meetings between the regular in-person workshops. But they can and should not replace in-person workshops – they do not offer the chance for informal communication among the project partners which is the prerequisite for building personal networks, building trust and develop ideas together.

The online workshops are very efficient, they are very carefully planned.

The online meetings are too long for the online format. We should split these workshops into to 2 separate days.

The online workshops are very well organised. But they can never replace face-to-face workshops. Face-to-face meetings have such a high added value! This is the only way we can get to know international partners better with their own unique qualities. The workshops are important to achieve the project goals, but they also open up opportunities to network in informal discussions and to develop new ideas and cooperation opportunities that go beyond the project. This kind of thing can only happen in informal conversations at face-to-face events.

They are fine and very valuable in between the regular workshops. But we would not like them to replace the physical meetings.

The in-person meetings are invaluable to build trust among partners.

Do you have any suggestions for improving the workshops overall?

Maybe we could find a way to choose the exact date of the workshops in a more “distributed” manner – a doodle among all partners?

Leave more time for informal meetings, activities and talks to foster networking among project partners.

Travelling to the workshops is sometimes difficult for us Latvians. We are at the outer rim of Europe, thus there are not many flights that we can take to distant destinations. Taking this into account would be helpful.

7. Dissemination of project results

Have you carried out dissemination activities yourself?

All project partners have been disseminating information on 3LoE and its results to a wider audience and continue to do so. They used online channels like social media,

websites and email newsletters, some have initiated newspaper reports; many partners gave presentations to their employees, students and peer groups. Some partners emphasised that in-person communication in smaller circles are the most effective way to have a lasting effect in spreading the results of such projects.

Yes. We use our website and social media channels to spread the word. There were also some articles in the local newspapers. And next year there will be a chambers event where we will also take part and present results.

Yes, we promote the centre extensively. We are already in negotiations with the Minister of Education who will officially accredit our sustainable restaurant training course!

Yes, we have contacted some vocational schools and companies – we have informed them about the trainings we are doing right now, and we would like to repeat those with them. We will also go on trips to visit companies and present the centre to their management.

We report on the project and its results on social media like facebook and on a local news portal. In spring 2023 we will have a large forum with our Lithuanian partners where we will present the topics of sustainability and the results of 3LoE.

We publish news on the project via our website and our facebook channel. We also are partner in other Erasmus projects – we use those meetings to talk about 3LoE and its results. And we share the results with our more than 100 employees at our agency who spread the word among our stakeholders.

Homepage, social media. Also pointed out results and structures at events within our study programmes. However, communication in small expert circles is always most effective.

Yes, in meetings with entrepreneurs, on conferences and in workshops.

We share information on our website and social media. But we think this is – though mandatory – not very effective. The best way of disseminating the idea and results is through personal communication and presentation at live events. We did that on several transnational meetings. We had great feedback from the audience, which led to the establishment of other Erasmus partnerships. We also shared our experiences and results of 3LoE with project partners in Latin America.

Physical objects like the 3LoE cube were very helpful to start interactions with people.

Yes. We use our website and social media channels (facebook and tiktok) to disseminate news about the project. And we use the 3LoE cube a lot in meetings. It is a perfect tool to spark interest in the project!

One idea of us to improve the outreach of our dissemination efforts: One partner of each country could become an 3LoE ambassador to the EPALC community. We could present the 3LoE efforts there which is a highly relevant audience.

Yes, we spread information on the university homepage and via facebook. And we also published three articles already on the project at Scopus and Nomos.

Do you think that the project results will be used in the future by third parties (institutions that were not involved in the project implementation as project partners) in your region/country? Please provide an estimate and briefly justify it.

Most of the 3LoE partners are sure that the results will be used by other organisations in the future. The quality of the educational programmes is very high, and the topics (green economy, innovation) are highly relevant for SMEs, students and society, which makes them attractive for other providers. A minority of partners was pointing out that there is a lot of competing supply of education programmes and that the effective marketing of 3LoE's results will be key to its sustainable success.

Another aspect is the innovative structure the 3LoE centres, bringing together stakeholders from vocational training, further training and higher education. Successful 3LoE centres can become pilots or even role models for other regions that want to bridge the gap between vocational training and higher education.

Absolutely! The curricula are good, they will be taken up by others. This is already the case, WiFi Tirol and WiFi Niederösterreich are very interested in the fire protection and energy efficiency programmes.

Yes, I think so. We are already in negotiations with the Minister of Education who will officially accredit our sustainable restaurant training course!

Yes, we think so. Vocational schools should find the results very useful. We know of a school focussed on waste management that is interested in some modules of our curricula.

Yes, absolutely. They are doing so already. One local vet school has extended its programme by one year dedicated towards sustainability based on the 3LoE results. And a training specialist from Padua has taken up the KAIN method for their coaching approach. So these results are very useful for many educational organisations and they are applicable.

Yes, many local companies can use the results as well as students – e.g. the resources on water saving and water recycling are very valuable, even from a business standpoint. We are creating a structure to make the materials and knowledge available.

They will, yes! I can share my own experience: I often visit the website of the Hanse-Parlament and click through all the different projects and their results. I find a lot of interesting and useful material there, so I take what I need for our chamber's purposes. Other organisations will do the same with the results of 3LoE.

The concept of the centres is worth using in the future. Local vet schools are already cooperating with higher education institutions – this is the future of vocational education! And vet schools can borrow curricula and materials produced in 3LoE to use in their courses.

Yes, this is definitely possible, at least here in Spain. Our regional and national governments are planning to create a new generation of training centres for vocational training and life-long learning. There are many similarities to our 3LoE centre, that might become a role model/pilot centre for this new system. i.e. the structure and management procedures that we develop in our centre, and our experiences could become very valuable for third parties in the future.

Absolutely. We will share the experience we gain in building the Centre of Professional Excellence and cooperating with the different education providers. And the educational programmes and materials are meeting the demands of many education providers, addressing the big challenges of our time (e.g. climate change, resource scarcity, digital transformation). Other education providers have the same demands – and the results of 3LoE offer great flexibility for users to adapt them according to anybody's needs.

Yes, if these organisations have a connection to the Hanse-Parlament or are strongly related to the subject matter of the Centres of Excellence.

This could be partly the case, but it is not certain. Many education providers develop their own programmes, always depending on the demand of their clients. That means there is competition.

Theoretically, yes. But that depends on dissemination. The results and programmes have to be found as well. We want to establish a platform in Styria that pools training paths and information on sustainability. This will hopefully enable a long-term use of the results.

It is up to us to spread the word! The materials and concepts are good, but we must advertise it a lot more to get others inspired!

8. Project management, steering and implementation of the project

**How would you rate the steering and coordination by the lead partner?
Scale from 1 (very good) to 5 (poor).**

Almost all project partners stated that the steering and coordination of the lead partner was “very good” (1). Only two partners’ scores were slightly lower, but still “good” (one time 1.5 and one time 2).

What was particularly good? What was particularly bad?

All project partners emphasised the exceptionally good work of the coordinator Melanie. The project is very large with a lot of partners from different countries and regions – nonetheless the project is managed smoothly, with all information prepared and shared in time. All partners know what tasks have to be done at what time, and Melanie and her colleagues in Hamburg are always happy to find solutions for any kind of problems that may occur. One partner added one suggestion to improve the coordination even further: the design of the slides and materials that the Hanse-Parlament is sharing could benefit from a relaunch.

The project officer Melanie is outstanding! This project is very large and extremely ambitious. And Melanie deals with these tasks perfectly.

The project management is always available and responds quickly. The personal interaction is very friendly and productive.

The coordinator Melanie is fantastic. The project is extremely big and complex, sometimes we are joking that it is a total mess – but Melanie keeps track of all the strands and manages all tasks perfectly.

The project coordinator Melanie does not think in terms of problems but provides suggestions for solutions.

The direct access to the team is very helpful. They provide great support for this highly complex project. And there is always room for confidential discussions!

The reliability and speed at which all information is provided is excellent! At the same time the lead partner is very approachable and flexible to provide support.

The project manager Melanie is outstanding! The project is huge, but she manages everything perfectly. We know exactly which tasks we need to do and when, and if we have problems, we can discuss them and find solutions. She is very easy to work with, flexible and acknowledges the different circumstances of the different partner countries.

The lead partner is fantastic! The project manager Melanie is doing a perfect job! She is very patient and helps a lot in establishing contacts among the partners!

The project manager Melanie is doing a great job. She is sharing all information timely, the meetings are prepared perfectly, and if we are stuck at some point, we quickly get support from her.

Melanie is a great coordinator. She is very helpful, answers questions and knows about the issues that international partners may face in their countries, she helps us to find solutions for these problems.

The coordination is just perfect. We always get help and support immediately. In urgent cases we talk on zoom quickly and we can discuss the things that we struggle with.

We can do nothing but learn from the Hanse-Parlament! We feel super taken care of. The schedule is good, the deadlines are pointed out to us and are enforced. But we also get great support with thematic problems. And the lead partner is so open to accepting support himself, e.g. with dissemination.

The management was seamless, we can only learn from them how to run a project. Their experience is invaluable – they understand problems that are specific to the different countries and are able to provide solutions for them. This is very important in a multi-national project like this one.

They are absolutely wonderful people. They are highly experienced and competent, and they support us extremely well. They give us confidence that the outcomes will be good!

The only thing that could be improved is the design – not the content – of the presentations/slides/materials. The Hanse-Parlament does not seem to invest much energy and resources in the aesthetic aspects of their slides and materials. There is some room for improvement.

What do you think about the shared document the central steering tool?

Most partners are satisfied with the shared online tool that displays all stepstones of the project. In a project as large as 3LoE such a document gets very complex – one partner struggled to work out their individual schedule because of that.

It is fine. Everything is one place. We like it.

We have a google drive document that we use, but only Melanie updates it. That works fine!

Due to the large number of partners the activity planning is great a central steering tool.

It is a very long document, because of the number of partners. But it gets updated regularly and it works just fine.

The tool is a bit complicated. All partners are listed, which is confusing with such a large project, the overview is huge. We had to work out our individual plan in a lengthy process and find out which partner will provide us with which preliminary work.

How would you rate the bureaucratic effort involved in the implementation, reporting and accounting of the project?

While some partners were not bothered by the amount of work needed for the accounting and reporting procedures so far, others were complaining about it (stating at the same time that the lead partner was not to blame). The time sheets for recording the working hours, the reimbursement of costs and the internal evaluations were mentioned as causing high workloads.

The bureaucratic load is very reasonable.

It is a little bit bureaucratic, but just as much as all international projects.

It is alright. We are used to these things.

There is a lot of paperwork to do, but we have a large group management section that can deal with that.

The documentation is very bureaucratic. A lot of paperwork! But I do not see any options for the lead partner to reduce this burden, as this is an EU requirement.

The time sheets are incredibly time-consuming. It eats up a lot of time and energy.

The reporting in Erasmus projects is usually very easy. But in this project the demands by the Commission are very strict which causes a huge workload: We have to report real costs all the time, i.e. provide every payslip, every single receipt ... We would like to suggest to switch back to a more general accounting procedure.

The reporting and the accounting of costs and working hours is extremely difficult for our organisation: We are a company that comprises more than 100 sub-companies, and people of several sub-companies get involved in the project. This makes the accounting process very complicated and time-consuming.

Funds allocated for the implementation of tasks should be settled on a lump-sum basis.

The accounting of the project has been very easy so far. The documentation, on the other hand, is complicated and time-consuming. Evaluation reports have to be prepared for all measures, including questionnaires for all participants and teachers. Moreover, these questionnaires are in English, which is too high a hurdle for our participants. We therefore had to translate all the questionnaires.

9. How do you assess the project in general?

What was particularly good about the project and its implementation?

The project partners praised the lead partner and their work, the innovative concept of the centres integrating all three levels of education, the personal exchange with the other international partners and finally the quality and adaptability of the educational programmes developed in 3LoE.

The lead partner is outstanding. Their level of professionalism is particularly high.

The management by the lead partner and the project officer Melanie was very good. And the topic of the project is very innovative and relevant for the pressing challenges of education.

The concept of the Centres of Professional Excellence is very innovative.

This project gives us the chance to learn how to integrate all three levels of education – and the potential to transfer this approach to a new generation of education centres that our government is planning to introduce in the future.

The face-to-face meetings with the other project partners were particularly helpful and productive. The personal exchange.

Observing good practices of other partners, sharing experience.

It is a huge project that requires a lot of working hours from us – which we as vet schoolteachers have to do in our free time. So, it takes a lot of energy to meet the project tasks, but the outcome is very positive – for our school, our students and the SMEs of our region.

The outstanding part so far is the adaptability of the training programmes.

The project is absolutely fantastic! It is perfectly aligned to the European Commission's goals and the Green Deal. It covers all sensitive issues like education, environment, entrepreneurship. The Hanse-Parlament has foreseen these tendencies! Because the Hanse-Parlament has a vision!

This is the best EU project that I am in. It gives us great opportunity to learn. Although we are so many people from different countries, the atmosphere is great with a lot of respect.

The best thing about the project is that it is very sustainable. Once the project has finished, we will use the study programmes, modules, and materials at our college. The project is designed to be sustainable. We will benefit from it for a very long time.

What was less good and should be improved?

Some partners mentioned that the exchange among the centres in the different countries should be improved and intensified in the second phase of the project. Another aspect was the very large number of project partners which makes it difficult

to get to know and to built ties to everyone. Establishing sub-groups may help in this respect.

The exchange with the other centres in the six other countries should be intensified.

The exchange about external acceptance (e.g. by SMEs) of the educational programmes should be intensified, also about the perspective in the different countries on the equivalence of the educational pathways. This would be desirable for the second half of the project.

The number of project partners is very large. 22 partners with a number of employees – this makes networking and building trust and ties very difficult. One option would be organising sub-group meetings on specific topics.

The project is very big. We need more communication and cooperation among the international partners! And we have to improve our dissemination efforts – we have to speak about the results more so that they really get picked up by others.

I would like to mention that the choice of partners for the centres is crucial. We had to substitute one partner of our centre at short notice – this has caused some initial problems or friction. This is one point that could be improved.

What grade would you give the whole project on a scale from 1 (very good) to 5 (poor)?

On average, the project partners rated the 3LoE project with an overall grade of 1.4.

Any additional comments or suggestions regarding the project and its implementation?

It would be nice if the cooperation and exchange with the six other centres could be continued beyond the end of the project. And if project funds could be used to finance our centre's own office, this would improve internal cooperation.

5.2 Interviews with associated Partners

In separate projects with a limited number of project partners, the Hanse Parliament develop support measures for SMEs, e.g. vocational training, further training, higher education or consulting, promoting tools, Best Practices ect. After testing and evaluation, the developed and successfully tested products are transferred to 50 chambers and associations as well as to 20 colleges/universities from 13 countries. From the very beginning, the members of Hanse Parliament were involved as associated partners in the 3LOE project. Right from the start, the associated partners were involved on a project-related basis; they gathered all the information, submitted their proposals and offers, which were continuously included in further work. The

associated partners as well as the transfer activities have already been discussed in written evaluations and also in interviews with the project partners.

An external expert conducted interviews with associated partners that have received results and products of 3LOE project in recent years. These interviews lasted between 15 and 25 minutes each. The interviews followed a generic set of questions but allowed also for free conversation to hear the opinions of the interview partners. The interview focused on the following topics:

- The centralized development of support measures for SMEs and their decentralized dissemination
- The use of the developed support measures and the assistance provided by Hanse-Parlament
- General identification of project topics and project design.

1. The 3LOE project develop support measures for SMEs (e.g. vocational training, further and higher education or consulting) with a limited number of project partners. After testing and evaluation, the support measures are transferred by Hanse-Parlament to all 70 chambers, associations, colleges and universities.

What do you think about this approach of centralized development and decentralized dissemination and utilization?

All interviewees stated that the approach of centralized development of support measures and the decentralized dissemination of these project results is working very well and that it has proven its effectiveness in the past.

This approach is working very well. It seems to be based on the German model, with a very prominent role of chambers of crafts and chambers of commerce as multipliers. But the Hanse-Parlament is bringing together not only chambers, but also SMEs and universities – all relevant stakeholders that contribute their unique skills and perspectives. That is very useful.

The approach is working very well. You have to limit the number of partners in the development process to keep it manageable. But the network of the entire partners helps a lot to share the results with many people, organisations and users.

Do you feel sufficiently informed about the respective work, even if you are not involved as a project partner?

All transfer partners get enough information about other Hanse-Parlament projects and their results. They either seek such information themselves and find it on the Hanse-Parlament's social media channels or the project websites; or they receive information on other projects via the newsletter, brochures and presentations at meetings.

We receive a good amount of information from the Hanse-Parlament. Just recently we received the newsletter with a lot of information about projects and their results.

We receive enough information. We get the information on common events like annual conferences, we receive emails and newsletters and also brochures on paper.

The Hanse-Parlament is offering many opportunities to follow other projects: Their social media channels, the project websites. And at meetings like meetings of other projects and at the general meeting, the secretariate shares a lot of information on results of other projects.

2. As a member of the Hanse-Parlament you will receive the finalized products for the support of SMEs.

Do you look at these outputs and assess them for your own work?

The answers to this question were completely varied. While one partner said they always look at the results of other projects, others said that they only look at such results of projects that relate directly to their own core topics. And one transfer partner said that they usually do at all do not look at results of projects that they are not involved in, because they do not have any time to do so.

Yes, we always look at the results of other Hanse-Parlament projects.

It depends on the topics of the projects. Not all projects and their results are relevant for us as a university. But when the results are related to our core topics we definitely do look closely at the results.

Unfortunately, I usually do not have the time to look at the results of other projects.

Are these project outcomes of interest for your own work?

As one may have expected, the relevance of the project outcomes depends on the projects' topics. The closer the topics are to the topics that the transfers partners' work is focused on, the more interesting are the results for the transfer partners.

When the results are related to our core interests - like (higher) education, digitalisation of SMEs, labour market developments and migration – they are very interesting for our work.

Many of the outcomes are very interesting and relevant for our work. As a higher education institution, we are interested in educational programmes, but also results of scientific studies.

Some of the results are interesting, but the results of the projects that we have been taking part in are more relevant for us than the ones we did not take an active part in.

For which purposes of your own work do you use the results?

The universities that were interviewed use the results of the project to incorporate them into their teaching programmes and/or into their research activities. The chamber that

was interviewed would use results for consulting/supporting SMEs, but as they stated above, this is often the case.

We are a university that is doing mostly applied research on SMEs, labour market, digitalisation and socio-economic developments. Some results of Hanse-Parlament projects feed into those research activities, like cases of best practice or key findings of research analysis done in Hanse-Parlament projects. We also use the project results as a source for networking, to find potential partners for research activities and projects with international partners.

We use results of projects to incorporate them into our own study programmes.

Do you get all the help you need for your own use of the results when you are not a partner in a project?

All transfer partners stated that the results contain enough information so that they can use them. And in case they are not sure about anything, they said they could contact the Hanse-Parlament at any time to ask for help. Thus, none of the interviews needs any additional, individual advice to use the results of the project.

Yes. The materials that are produced in the projects are written very well, very clear, detailed and well structured.

Yes. We get enough information to assess the results. Whenever we have additional questions we can contact the Hanse-Parlament office and ask for support.

Do you wish to receive comprehensive individual advice on your own use and implementation of the support measures received?

That is not necessary, we can always ask the Hanse-Parlament office for support and additional information if needed.

In the cases that we do need special advice and support, we reach out to the Hanse-Parlament ourselves and receive the support we need.

3. How can projects and results be better aligned to your needs?

Do you have sufficient opportunity to integrate your needs, topics and tasks into the design of the project?

All associated partners that were interviewed said that they have influence on the design of projects.

Yes, we talk about the design of projects at annual meetings, we exchange emails on that matter. This way we can have some influence on the design of projects.

We always have the chance to talk about ideas for projects.

The Hanse-Parlament share project proposals and we have the chance to give feedback, which is very well received and implemented.

Do you feel sufficiently informed about the preparation of the project?

The associated partners do get informed about the preparation and acquisition of new projects. But one partner stated that the information was shared late – they would like to be informed earlier to have more influence on the preparation process (see also next sub-question).

Yes, we get information about that during informal meetings at workshops or at the annual meeting of the Hanse-Parlament.

Well, we only get that information at a late stage. The application for projects is prepared by the Hanse-Parlament. And only when this application has reached a certain level, the Hanse-Parlament is reaching out to potential partners and asks them if they want to join.

Do you have suggestions for improvement?

We would love to get involved at an earlier stage – developing ideas for projects together with the Hanse-Parlament and maybe also other partners. Maybe we could arrange online-meetings to do such developmental brainstorming's on what kind of projects could be done in the future.

4. What do you think about ...

... the identification of topics of the project?

All associated partners stated that the identification of topics of projects is done very well – the topics match the demands of SMEs, chambers and universities as well as the funding programmes/criteria of the European Commission. One partner gave a hint that the Commissions funding criteria may limit the focus of projects to topics that are popular; potentially more innovative, but not yet popular topics may get overlooked.

The Hanse-Parlament is doing a great job! It is a fantastic establishment. They have a unique network of partners, great sense and knowledge about the needs of SMEs.

The topics are excellently chosen. They are very relevant for SMEs and higher education as well.

The identification of topics of projects is very good, very efficient. It is well aligned to the funding schemes of the European Union. But the European Union is never ahead of the market but rather reacting to developments.

... the design and implementation of the project?

All associated partners were very satisfied with the way the Hanse-Parlament is designing its projects – this is reflected in the high acceptance rate of project applications. The implementation of funded projects is also regarded as highly professional and effective.

The projects are very well designed, they have a very high rate of approval when they apply for projects. And I have never heard of any project that got in trouble – they are all implemented very professionally.

The projects that we were part of were all very well designed and implemented!

c) ... the broad transfer and use of the project outcomes?

All partners agreed that that transfer of the results is important and that the Hanse-Parlament is doing well on its part. But eventually it is up to the partners themselves to make the transfer and implementation of the results sustainable.

The broad transfer is very important and working well.

This does not depend on the Hanse-Parlament, but rather the project partners and their networks. When the project funding ends, many partners cannot work on the transfer of the results anymore. But we all can and do build on the results of previous projects und use them indirectly for our future work.

5. Would you like to participate more or less as a partner in projects?

The majority of the associated partners would like to participate in more projects than in the past.

Same as in the past.

Definitely more projects than now. But we would like to participate not only as an education partner – we are also interested in being responsible for research activities and boosting the entrepreneurial potential of students/staff of SMEs.

More projects, please – we now have a project manager who is eager to get to work with the Hanse-Parlament!

Summary of evaluation results and recommendations

The project application planned the development and implementation of a wide range of support and educational measures. During the planning phase in the first few months of the project and in the further course of project implementation, the development and implementation of additional support and educational measures were included on a very large scale in all eight COVEs at the request of companies, public administrations, other educational institutions, etc. This led to a very complex project:

- a) The project was realized by 23 partners (vocational schools, business chambers / SME associations, universities and public administrations) from 7 countries (Austria, Germany, Latvia, Lithuania, Italy, Poland and Spain).
- b) Eight COVEs were founded and developed, and their long-term continuation has been secured.
- c) Involved in the project work and international co-operation were 70 associated partners (business chambers, SME associations, vocational training institutions, colleges and universities) from 13 countries. The long-term continuation of transnational cooperation with all project and associated partners was also secured.
- d) In the 3LOE project were developed and implemented:
 - 6 Train the Trainer programs
 - 59 vocational training, further education and study programs (EQF Level 3 - 7)
 - 5 tools and support programs
 - 10 concepts and political strategy programs

A total of 36 very comprehensive results were compiled.

- e) The 3LOE project has established eight COVEs that have developed, tested, evaluated and implemented numerous support and education programs. The following took part in the implementation of the programs during the project period:

Teachers & Trainers	218
Learners	4.548
Companies	483
Associated Partner	479
Total	5.728

This enormous complexity made controlling the project very difficult, posed major challenges for project management and led to high levels of workload for all partners. The evaluations have shown that despite the great complexity, the project was managed very successfully, all planned activities were carried out and all results were produced to a high quality.

Various results demonstrate exemplary management, cooperation and implementation of the 3LOE project. The control and information tools developed and used by the lead

partner have proven to be particularly effective and are also used by individual partners for their own purposes, regardless of the project.

The broad transfer and implementation of the project results went very well. The transfer recipients were optimally involved in the project work, including a high level of re-use.

The program has succeeded in creating a good team spirit and turning the entire project consortium into a kind of learning organization and project implementation into a continuous learning process. The evaluation results were continuously incorporated into further project work so that continuous improvements could be achieved.

The remarkable project results are achieved due to the high commitment of all project partners and the excellent project management. The developed results are evaluated very positively by the project partners and the transfer partners and will continue to be implemented on a large scale within the scope of their service offer.

The management and work instructions developed and implemented by the lead partner, in particular activity plan, dissemination planning and forms for reporting and accounting have proven their worth. The lead partner carries out strict, strong project management, which is surprisingly appreciated by all partners. The lead partner takes on very extensive organizational and management tasks, relieves the project partners as much as possible so that they can focus on the content.

The cooperation within the consortium is assessed by all parties as constructive, target-oriented and harmonious. The exchange of information and communication and international cooperation is positive. The project and transfer partners spoke in written surveys and detailed personal interviews about very successful transfer and implementation processes, which are described as exemplary. The implementation of these activities with intensive personal exchange and individual implementation consulting is associated with very high costs, especially for the lead partner, in order to achieve broad regional dissemination and high implementation results.

The performed evaluation results as a summary lead to the following suggestions for improvements for the further project work and for the future performance of projects:

- The Covid pandemic made project implementation difficult and caused delays. A larger number of online meetings were held to maintain communication and information sharing. Online meetings have certainly proven their worth, but they can by no means replace face-to-face meetings. In future, regular face-to-face meetings will be supplemented by online meetings with the entire consortium at least twice a year. In addition, online meetings will be held with individual partners as needed.
- To further improve communication and cooperation, implementation of online meetings between the semi-annual project meetings. For face-to-face workshops every 6 months is perfect. But it will be good to add online workshops in between like every 3 months to foster discussion and communication among the partners.

- Especially at the beginning of the project, more time for the lead partner to convey the extensive information on project implementation and, after the kick-off workshop, for all partners to be provided with a clear manual for processing all tasks.
- More time should be set aside in the face-to-face workshops for informal discussions and activities. This time is necessary to build networks, build trust and to become creative together.
- In each workshop more time should be planned for brainstorming; individual partners would like two hours for this. The use of skype or other online tools for short meetings between the official workshops can also reduce the time needed for the biannual project meetings and further improve communication.
- Even better time management to ensure that all deadlines are met by all partners. Further strengthening requires personal responsibility and initiative of the project partners during project implementation, e.g., meeting deadlines or carrying out separate tasks, e.g., sending reports in time.
- It has proved very successful for the lead partner to design its effective management tools such as activity plan, dissemination plan and budgeting in digital form during the first six months of the project and make them available to the project partners online. In addition, the project-specific online database, in which all instruments, information, results etc. are clearly organized so that the partners can find everything in one place and do not have to search through their documents, has proved particularly useful. Electronic time recording would be helpful. And the possibility of using electronic signatures.
- In the design of EU programs, strong financial incentives should be given for successful dissemination and implementation. Support for dissemination and implementation of project results could also be encouraged by providing 5 – 10 % of an approved budget for each funded project as an additional performance bonus in the event of a successful transfer/implementation.
- Individual partners raise concerns that the calls for proposals and the Commission's selection and funding criteria may limit the focus of projects to popular topics; potentially more innovative but not yet popular topics may be overlooked.
- The EU should review and redesign the system for accounting for personnel costs. Limitation on daily working hours (8 hours max) and no working hours on Saturdays and Sundays is no more valid since people work sometimes more than eight hours a day and/or during weekends. The classic working week (Monday to Friday) is somehow outdated. What is needed is more flexibility in working hours, which is reflected in timesheets.