# ITELab project – Independent Evaluation 2017

# *** FINAL ***

## Introduction

This document constitutes the first deliverable (D6.3.1) of the independent evaluator: it reports on the evaluation of the ITELab project, as performed in November 2017 when the three-year project had been running for eleven months. The evaluator will report two more times: at the end of 2018 and again towards the very end of the project, in December 2019.

The information for this evaluation report has been collected through face-to-face and telephone interviews with three work package (WP) leaders and the overall project co-ordinator, as well as through a survey completed by eight members of the partnership. Overall, representatives of each of the ten core partners have provided input to this evaluation.

This report focuses very much on the activities of the core partners in the project. In the course of the year a Pedagogical Board and a University-ICT industry forum have been established. These bodies, as well as the Associate Partners that are signing up to the project, will be included in the evaluation exercise next year.

The core section of this report contains the findings of the interviews and surveys as provided by the interviewees and respondents. The chapter is ordered around the key topics addressed in the survey as either open or closed questions; in the interviews similar issues have been addressed. In both cases, questions were formulated in such a way that they can feature again in forthcoming evaluations and their outcomes compared over time. The outcomes of the current survey and interviews are complementary and mutually reinforcing.

In a final section, the evaluator provides his own considerations on the project in general and the evaluation results in particular. A draft version of this report has been discussed with the project co-ordinator and the WP leader on quality assurance. Their input has been taken on board in the final version.

## Findings

### A. Project relevance

Partners were asked to indicate why they had decided to join the ITELab project and which elements in the proposal attracted them most. The responses contain a variety of reasons for joining this project. Three topics were mentioned by almost all respondents: (i) the cooperation with several stakeholders from both higher education and industry; (ii) the integration of ICT in initial teacher education; and (iii) the contribution to the pedagogical skills of future teachers.

One education partner formulated the relevance of the proposal as follows: "When we read the initial proposal for the ITELab project we saw that it gave us an opportunity to develop areas that we have found challenging in our own initial teacher education programmes. We viewed the project as highly relevant and as a good opportunity to work with and learn from other higher education institutions across Europe. The project also gave us an opportunity to work with tech companies, an area of cooperation that we did not have much experience with, but were interested in exploring." Another education partner was attracted by "the attention to future teacher education, the cooperation in practical laboratories and the sharing of experiences among other European universities and industry partners."

One of the industry partners indicated that it "firmly believes that education is under pressure these days and needs to adopt quickly to address challenges arising from changes in the way we teach, changes among the learners and teachers and changes deriving from technological advancements."

The lead partner referred to the overall EUN strategy that aims to address the gap in initial teacher education of the pedagogical use of ICT in the training of new teachers, through a series of initiatives, including this project which focuses on digital elements. One of the WP leaders was particularly "attracted by the practical dimension of the project and its application for (future) teachers."

## B.  Activities undertaken in 2017

All respondents agreed that the ITELab project is well underway. Eleven months into the project, the activities are still in line with the initial plans.

The interviewees indicated that in the way the project is currently implemented two elements are different from the initial proposal: first of all, the proposal was written having in mind to start the three-year project in September/October, i.e. at the start of the academic year. Starting in January meant that the piloting phase had to be brought forward and that the preparation time for the key project deliverables – the modules and the MOOC – needed to be reduced if these outputs were to be tested in higher education institutions during the academic year. Secondly, the initial proposal looked at secondary education, while the education partners involved address initial teacher education for both primary and secondary schools. This MOOC, according to the WP leader, promotes the attitude of sharing and lifelong learning in future teachers, focusing on the practical by trying out new digital tool and connecting with other teachers.

Partners are particularly satisfied with the coordination of the project. Moreover, they like the alignment of the resources for modules and MOOC. Several partners nevertheless mentioned that the preparation and design of the modules and the MOOC has been taking a lot of time. Furthermore, it proved difficult to come up with an agreed definition of, and a shared and validated plan for, the MOOC. This MOOC, according to the WP leader, is "not an academic

e-learning module, but a basic and more social learning tool that aims to build the attitude of teachers".

### C. ITELab Partnership
The eight survey respondents were all either very or rather satisfied with the number and type of partners in ITELab. Four partners are very satisfied with the degree of activity and cooperation within the partnership, while four other partners are rather satisfied.

One WP leader referred to the partnership as "an interesting and potentially productive mixture of academic and industry resources" Another WP leader emphasised the visibility this project provides to each of the core partners. The project coordinator is satisfied with the core partnership and looks forward to bringing on board associate partners in the future.

### D. Project Management
Across interviews and survey responses, project management is the item that is most consistently applauded by all partners. All eight survey respondents indicated that they are very satisfied with the way the project is managed by EUN. The project coordinator is very much appreciated for her immediate responses and ongoing availability, as well as for the way she leads the project in a firm but friendly manner. Several respondents moreover appreciated the regular project updates and the attention to detail.

### E. Co-ordination of Work Packages
Asked about the way in which the individual WPs are coordinated partners are either very satisfied or rather satisfied. Six partners are very satisfied with WP 2 on ICT monitoring in initial teacher education, while four partners are very satisfied with WP 3 on module development and two partners express a similar appreciation for the coordination of the MOOC.

Coordinators indicated that the role of the higher education institutions in the project has been very clear so far, as they have been providing pedagogical practices, as well as examples of materials and resources in supporting the development of the modules and the MOOC. During the first eleven months of the project, however, it proved somewhat more difficult for industry partners to find their position in the project. So far, they have mainly played a consultative role looking at what is being done at the different partner universities. Industry partners are balancing their commitment between their own (commercial) deliverables and their input to the project deliverables. Their role is likely to become more targeted in year two, when industry partners will among others look at the draft version of the modules and the MOOC and will challenge the university partners to ensure that the deliverables offered are produced in the best possible way.

### F. Deliverables

The project has produced several deliverables in the course of the first year. Partners are invariably positive about the quality of these outputs. The overview below indicates how many respondents were very satisfied with each of the deliverables:

| The project produced several deliverables. Are you satisfied with the quality of … | | | | | |
|---|---|---|---|---|---|
| | very satisfied | satisfied | hardly satisfied | not at all satisfied | no opinion |
| Literature review | 6 | 2 | 0 | 0 | 0 |
| Evaluation plan | 8 | 0 | 0 | 0 | 0 |
| Quality assurance plan | 6 | 1 | 0 | 0 | 1 |
| Dissemination & Communication plan | 5 | 3 | 0 | 0 | 0 |
| ITE monitoring report | 5 | 1 | 0 | 0 | 2 |
| Case studies publication | 4 | 3 | 0 | 0 | 1 |

The coordinators were also satisfied with the deliverables. The project coordinator emphasised that the deliverables are quality controlled internally by senior experts from EUN before the outputs are made public. WP leaders refer to the literature review as a very helpful background deliverable emphasising the presence of the academic world. Given the very demanding timeframe, they considered that the quality of the products is particularly high.

### G. Future ambitions

A final question to both interviewees and respondents related to the future as they were asked to identify what they would like the partnership to achieve by the end of the ITELAb project (December 2019). Coordinators indicated that the targets of the project are quite challenging in terms of content (the envisaged deliverables), timing (by the end of 2019, covering three calendar rather than academic years) and number of users.

In fact, several WP leaders mentioned that until now not a single EUN-coordinated project had forecast so many users: 5000 student teachers taking the MOOC and 30 universities looking at the modules. They agreed that this will require considerable efforts in terms of dissemination and awareness raising among a very specific target group: student teachers in their transition from school to work.

Other ambitions concerned the range of associate partners and the establishment of a sustainable higher education – industry forum that would continue to exist beyond the lifetime of the project.

## Considerations

The independent evaluator was hired by the ITELab project in June 2017 and has therefore been able to follow project developments for six months. During this period the evaluator has

studied the project proposal and the ITELab deliverables, and participated in two online meetings and one-face-to-face partnership gathering.

Taking on board these elements, as well as the results of the survey and the interviews, the evaluator considers that the ITELab project is doing very well and is doing so on all accounts:

- The proposal builds a well-motivated case for a very specific topic (integrating ICT in initial teacher education) that is of timely importance across Europe;
- It gathers a diverse group of partners who all have good reasons to join the project;
- The project coordination is excellent and the WP leaders are well cast for their task;
- The project partners are very motivated;
- The project is implemented somewhat differently than foreseen, but the actions and deliverables are realised within the agreed timeline;
- The deliverables so far are of good quality.

The evaluator does not see any flaws in the actions undertaken in 2017 and therefore encourages the partnership to continue the ITELab project with the same degree of enthusiasm and commitment.

The discussions with the coordinators, however, have signalled that the project seems potentially vulnerable in terms of action planning. Notwithstanding the successful implementation so far, the project has little room for manoeuvre in delivering the outcomes envisaged for year 2 and 3. Any delay – notably with regard to producing the modules and the MOOC - is likely to cause a snow-ball effect. Moreover, the tasks ahead will require coordination at different levels (overall partnership, Work Packages, individual partners) and on an even broader range of outputs: developing and testing modules and MOOC, establishing a viable associate partnership structure, quality assurance, dissemination, evaluation, and creating a sustainable education – industry forum. The evaluator has noticed in the interviews with the project coordinator and WP leaders that they are very much aware of these challenges. The partnership's handling of these challenges, the review process of the modules and MOOC, and the contribution of the external stakeholders to the ITELab project will form an integral part of next year's independent evaluation.

In sum, the evaluator considers that the project is well on track and that the coordinator, the WP leaders and the partners have adequate capacity to steer and implement the different aspects of ITELab successfully in the next year(s).


Mark Delmartino
Independent Evaluator
19.12.2017