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**“TWINNING AND PARTNERSHIP AS A
VEHICLE FOR SCHOOL CAPACITY
BUILDING”**

**A Training Programme for the new pilot school
principals in the VET Reform Programme – Phase II**

Belgrade, March 2006

CONNECTING

**A short guide to EU school
twinning and partnerships**

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1. What is twinning and partnerships?

VET schools interact with each other on many different levels. Some examples of this interaction are:

- Schools participate in a formal or informal network or association
- Staff from one school talks to staff from other schools at national, regional and international conferences
- One school contacts another for specific information or for a copy of a resource
- A mentor school shares knowledge or skills with a younger, smaller or newly formed school or school unit
- Two or more schools work together on a particular project
- Exchanges of staff between schools to improve knowledge or skills

These interactions can be formal or informal. They can be one-time or they can last for an extended period of time. They are critical to the success of VET schools do because they enable vital information to be exchanged and they create opportunities to work together.

2. Twinning and partnerships

These two terms are used in many different contexts.

Twinning means “making a twin of” someone.

The word is used in connection with **town twinning** which is a concept whereby towns or cities in geographically and politically distinct areas are paired with the goal of fostering human contact and cultural links. Twin towns often have similar demographic and other characteristics.

In Europe such pairs of towns are known as twin towns, friendship towns or partner towns (in German “Partnerstädte”)¹.

The EC is using the concept in at least two contexts:

The “**twinning exercise**” – this is the name for an EU policy instrument through which civil servants from the member states are seconded to the accession applicants with the task of speeding up the process of their legal convergence with the EU and the setting up of institutions for upholding and implementing the EU *acquis*.

¹ www.thefreedictionary.com

E-twinning is a framework created by the EC for schools to collaborate on the internet with partner schools in other European countries. E-twinning is the main action of the European Union's E-Learning Programme. It promotes school collaboration in Europe through the use of information and communication technologies by providing support, tools and services to make it easy for schools to form short or long term partnership in any subject area.

Partnership is defined in more ways. In business it is used to refer to the members of a business venture created by contract in which two or more persons or organizations agree to pool talent and money and share profits and losses. It can also be used to define a relationship between individuals or groups that is characterized by mutual cooperation and responsibility, as for the achievement of a specified goal.

The term partnership is often used about more formalized collaboration between schools, or schools and universities and companies or public organisations, as in for instance *centres of excellence* or in *public-private partnerships*. The basis of partnerships is often formal agreements.

In the present guidelines we will use both words. Twinning is a good concept because this word is indicating collaboration between very similar organizations like schools. For collaboration between schools the word has some of the same connotations as we find in town twinning, as "the goal of fostering human contact and cultural links" is also implied here, as well as the typical similarity in characteristics (offering similar courses to similar target groups etc).

Twinning contacts can lead to the establishment of regular partnership between two schools in relation to an activity.

An example: two schools decide to make it possible for some of their learners to do a part of their course in the other school and get credit for it.

In this guide it is assumed for convenience that the twinning or partnership takes place between two schools in each their country, but of course twinings and partnerships develop and often include a whole network of institutions in several countries.

The formation of strategic partnerships between schools in different countries is increasing in pace with the demand for international experience and improved language skills. An example is TEKO Centre in Denmark, the Danish school for training in the textile area, which has formed partnerships with schools in Milan, the USA and Slovenia to enable practice placements for their learners in appropriate environments.

3. Benefits of twinning and partnerships

The potential benefits of twinning (and partnerships) include the following:

a. Capacity building

Twinning and partnerships can help strengthen the school staff involved through sharing or transfer of skills and knowledge. This – in turn – can lead to renewed school strategy development and innovation.

b. Identification of best practices

Twinning and partnerships provide opportunities to identify ideas, approaches, techniques and methods that seem to have worked well for colleagues in partner schools and which can be shared and serve as inspiration for new initiatives and help schools avoid reinventing the wheel.

c. Added value, increased quality and effectiveness of school activities

Where the twinning and partnerships involve collaborating on a specific activity, it usually results in added value, more quality and effectiveness.

d. Broadening of horizons

Twinning and partnerships help school staff and learners to broaden their views and be more outward looking, to break down barriers, to understand other cultures and to learn about not only how education and training is developed and implemented in other countries but also the employment perspective in the regional context.

e. Relationship building

Twinning and partnerships can help build stronger relationships between school staff (and learners) in different countries. These relationships are one of the most important preconditions for lasting contacts and collaboration (sustainable contacts) and they can be drawn upon when either of the schools have a need which their partner can assist with or when opportunities arise for working together for instance in projects.

f. Networking

Twinning and partnerships can contribute to greater networking, for instance when the schools involved in collaboration are exposed to each other's existing local and regional networks. Networking can have wide and important

perspectives for instance in relation to foreign company investment, technology transfer and employment.

g. Mobility of teachers and learners

Twinning and partnerships are useful when schools want to create opportunities for mobility of teachers and learners. A partner school can host teachers and learners but it can also create the necessary contacts to companies and social partner organizations for practice placements and visits.

4. Forms of twinning and partnerships

Twinning and partnerships can take many different forms. Activities are mostly organized as projects²: There are at least 5 main categories: training exchanges, information exchanges, technical exchanges, collaboration on specific initiatives or projects and e-twinning. These categories are often combined in a bigger project or partnership activity. See also the annex on e-twinning.

4.1. Training exchanges

These involve one or more staff from one school visiting or linking up to the partner school for a period of time to learn or impart information and skills. Training exchanges can involve internships, on site training, online training or study tours.

- i. internships provide staff with the opportunity to work in another school to gain practical experience and exposure to the different ways in which that school organises and implements its training. Internships can be one-way (staff from one school visit the partner school) or two ways (the two schools exchange staff, either at the same time or at different times). The training of staff can be through participation in the hosting school's regular training or it can be specifically tailored to the needs of the visiting persons. The internship can be short (e.g. 1-3 weeks) or longer term (for instance 6 months). In some internship the visiting staff can temporarily fill positions in the host school.
- ii. On-site training occurs when a staff from one school that is experienced in a specific topic is invited to provide training to the partner school's staff, learners or social partners.

² A [project](#) is a temporary and one-time endeavor undertaken to create a unique product or service, that brings about beneficial change or added value. This property of being a temporary and a one-time undertaking contrasts with [processes](#), or operations, which are permanent or semi-permanent ongoing functional work to create the same product or service over and over again. The management of these two systems is often very different and requires varying technical skills and philosophy, hence requiring the development of project management. (Wikipedia: Project management).

- iii. Study visits are when a group of staff from one school visits a potential or existing partner school abroad for the purpose of understanding certain aspects of how the foreign school works, its conditions, services, collaboration with social partners etc. A study visit can comprise many different activities depending on the objective(s) of the visit: presentations, observation of workshop and classroom training, professional discussions, training, visits to social partner institutions and companies, joint conduction of mini projects, negotiations on how to start e-twinning etc.
- iv. An example of online learning is when staff act as tutors or learners in online courses that involve staff from the partner school. The online course can be part of the regular programme of the school offering the training or it can be tailor-made for a specific purpose.

4.2. Information exchanges

These are similar to training exchanges in that they involve staff from one school visiting the partner school, but the visits are limited to an exchange of information and do not involve training of the staff. As with the training exchanges, information exchanges can be one-way or two-way and can be part of a study visit.

Following first contacts and a visit to a partner school, information exchanges can also take place virtually, meaning that the communication and exchange of information is taking place strictly with the use of information and communication technologies. See also E-twinning.

4.3. Technical exchanges

These involve staff from one school travelling to the partner school to help implement a specific activity. The visiting staff may temporarily fill positions in the host organization (similar to internships).

4.4. Collaboration on specific initiatives or projects

This involves two (or more) organizations that agree to work together to establish a particular course, learning materials or project or to address another issue of mutual interest.

Typical examples of such activities are when EU VET schools collaborate on making a proposal for a project within the framework of the EU funded programmes like Leonardo.

4.5. E-twinning projects

Thanks to the development of internet and the World Wide Web a new and exciting form of collaboration between partner schools is now developing – the so-called e-twinning. The EC has made a special facility called the E-twinning framework in order to promote this type of collaboration.

E-twinning is a wonderful opportunity for all schools, EU or non EU. Where twinning and partnership in the “old days” (before 1991) was something that only the few really benefited from, the emergence of the new technologies has made it possible for many more staff and learners to enjoy the thrills of cross-border contacts and collaboration and even at a very modest cost compared to traditional twinning and partnerships.

5. Conditions for successful twinning and partnerships

Is your school ready to start twinning or looking for a partnership?

Below you will find a list of conditions that should be in place before you consider twinning or starting preparations for a partnership:

a. Vision/ purpose

Your school needs a clear sense of why it is embarking on twinning or a partnership project, that is – what do you think the project can contribute to your school and what can you get out of it?

For example you may feel that twinning or a partnership will give you new ideas and inspiration on how to implement student oriented teaching methods and outcome based learning.

Or you would like to discuss with your colleagues abroad ways to organize collaboration with the social partners.

Or you might want to see and discuss with your colleagues how they implement their mechatronics course, because your school is about to start such a course for the first time.

The importance of having at least one clear purpose for engaging in a twinning or partnership project cannot be overstated. The intensity of this purpose will have a significant impact on whether commitment, resources, time and funding are made available for the twinning or partnership project (and whether they are adequate).

b. Commitment

There needs to be a strong desire within your organization to embark on a twinning or partnership project. Your school has to be willing to learn and to share. There should be support for twinning or partnership at all levels: management, tutors, technical staff and learners. Ideally, international collaboration is included as a central point in your school's mission statement.

c. Time

Your school has to be prepared to devote the time necessary to make twinning and partnerships work. Twinning and partnerships are labour-intensive. There is no quick and easy way to do successful twinning or partnerships.

d. Capacity

Your schools need to have the staff capacity to take on twinning or partnerships. If you are stretched to the limit now, you will need to figure out how you can incorporate the additional work a twinning or partnership project would entail.

You should also consider if you have the language capacity in-house. There is no funding of interpreters, so your school needs to have the necessary capacity to speak the required language or languages, at least one of your staff needs to speak German if you want to have a German partner school, at least one staff needs to speak Italian if you want an Italian partner school, at least one staff needs to speak good English if you want a partner school in the Netherlands, in Denmark or Sweden and so on. If your school is weak in relation to this aspect, this is one of the first strategic issues you have to address!

How can you exploit the wonderful opportunities of e-twinning if your staff do not speak even one foreign language at a decent level? The most recent brain research has shown that the human being is never too old to start learning a new language....

e. Welcoming culture and attractive presentation

The culture of your school has to be welcoming to colleagues coming in from the outside. One aspect of this is to take into consideration that not everybody in this world speaks your language.

How your school is for instance presented on the internet? Do you have a clear and attractive website in English (or German or French or Spanish etc depending on what country or countries you would like to collaborate with)?

Your foreign language website should not just be a translation of your home page. After all, your international collaboration partners are not young people from Nis or Novi Sad or Vrnjacka Banja.

Your website is your visit card to the international community. When your new contacts want to decide if they would like to invest time and other resources in a twinning arrangement or partnership with your school, your website is one of the sure things they will check.

Why should they choose you and not a school in Bulgaria or the Czech Republic or Macedonia? Present yourself as a school with vision and a strategy, give examples of your projects and development activities, show how attractive and interesting your region is, mention how the economic development is, how you collaborate with local companies etc etc. Remember that most of your colleagues abroad have never even seen pictures of how beautiful Serbia is.

f. Funding

Twinning and partnerships will involve additional resources for your school, particularly for travel. To cover these costs, either funds will need to be found within your school or an external source of funding will need to be identified.

6. Successful twinning and partnerships – the characteristics

The below mentioned characteristics of successful twinning and partnerships have been distilled from past twinning and partnership projects:

- **Win – win**

For twinning and partnerships to be successful, there must be value added for both schools – it must be a win-win situation.

- **Compatibility**

Your chances of success are much greater if there is compatibility between the schools. To ensure good compatibility:

- There must be a similarity of experiences, concerns, interests, approaches and activities.
- Both schools should share an understanding and respect for each other's cultural norms and values, limitations and expectations.

Ideally, both schools will be at a similar level of maturity.

- **Maturity**

Twinning and partnerships work best when both schools have reached a level of organizational maturity that allows them to conduct a twinning or partnership project. For twinning and partnership to succeed, considerable staff time will need to be devoted to it and at least some infrastructure needs to be in place.

- **Realistic expectations**

It is important to keep expectations in check. The activities of the twinning or partnership project should be do-able within the available resources and time frames.

- **Needs driven**

Although there must be a good match between the needs and capacities of the two schools, the selected project activity should be driven primarily by the needs of each school. In other words, it is important to identify the needs and to find ways of addressing these needs.

- **Clear, narrow focus**

It is important to keep a clear and narrow and precise focus in the activities planned.

- **Funding**

Funding needs to be made available or confirmed early in the process and needs to be adequate.

- **Leadership**

Twinning and partnership projects are only successful when specific individuals in each organization take the lead. Often the best projects are those initiated by committed individuals from both schools who already know each other.

- **Good planning**

Good planning from the start is essential. For example:

- Considerable time needs to be spent at the outset determining what each organization can learn from the other. This means lots of research, good pre-planning and good communication between the schools.
- Each school needs to conduct needs and capacity assessments

- Sufficient time needs to be built in to allow relationships between the two schools to mature.
- Goals and objectives need to be clearly spelled out and a workplan needs to be developed. This is one way to ensure that the schools are serious about their role and that they have given a lot of thought to their respective needs and capacities.

- **Monitoring and evaluation**

Setting objectives during the planning process will help to make sure that the twinning or partnership project is results-based. It is also important, however, to establish indicators of success, to monitor the project on an ongoing basis and to evaluate the project at the end of or at selected intervals or milestones.

- **Flexibility**

The two schools have to be prepared to make adjustments along the way. A flexible, step by step approach to planning and implementation is preferable to a fixed blueprint strategy. This is particularly important for schools that embark on their first twinning or partnership project.

- **Good communication**

A good flow of information between the two schools is critical to the success of the twinning or partnership project. Communication issues can arise in the planning stage (e.g. adequately communicating needs and capacities) and in the implementation stage (e.g. articulating problems in a constructive manner).

- **Cultural sensitivity**

It is important to ensure that any training or information activities that are part of the project are tailored to the cultural realities of the recipient school.

Communication tips

Here are some tips for how to maintain good communication with your partner school:

- a. Set up a system of communication at the beginning of the twinning or partnership and identify the responsibilities each participant has for communication.
- b. Review the communication system regularly and be prepared to make changes.
- c. Take into account the fact that the two schools may have different communication styles

d. Acknowledge that problems in communication will occur and that the problems themselves must be communicated.

e. Do not rely too much on the paper process, get to know each other!!

Adapted from *Collaboration. What makes it work*, by Paul W Mattessich and Barbare R. Monsey.

7. Advantages of Mutual or Two-way twinning and partnerships

Schools that have participated in twinning and partnerships report that the most successful twinning and partnership project are those that are mutual or two-way – that means that each school learns from the other. Mutual twinning and partnerships are empowering for both schools. If the learning is exclusively or mainly one-way, the twinning is not well balanced and one of the partners may in the long run feel that they are always the ones contributing. The mutual aspect should be thought into twinning activities from the very start!

Even when the travel is one-way, for example when a school sends someone to a partner school to conduct training – the learning can still be two-way. In addition to giving information to the host school, the trainer can learn and take home information about the approaches and strategies used by the host school.

8. Other considerations

8.1. Language differences

When you select a partner, you will need to assess whether language differences could be a barrier to effective communication. Two factors to consider are the nature of the twinning or partnership project and the language capabilities of the two schools.

For some twinning or partnership projects you may need to make sure that many staff in both schools can speak the same language. For others, it may be sufficient if one staff in each school can communicate verbally and in writing in a common language.

It is important to make sure that the staff involved in the project have the language skills to accomplish the objectives of the project. As a general rule the project managers of each school should contact those selected as participants in the project to determine their level of fluency – oral and written. It would be reasonable, for example, to confirm the participants' level of oral fluency by having a telephone conversation with them, and asking them to send a copy of a

document or letter they have prepared in the language of the twinning or partnership project.

8.2. Intra-regional versus Inter-regional twinning or partnerships

Whether you choose to twin with a school from within your geographical region of the world (intra-regional) or with one from another region (inter-regional) will depend on several factors, including what the needs of your school are, which schools are interested in participating in a twinning or partnership project, where the most suitable match can be found, and whether you have already developed a relationship with a particular school.

Often, inter-regional twinning or partnership will involve more cultural and language differences than intra-regional twinning, but this is not always the case. In most cases, inter-regional twinning will involve greater travel costs.

9. How to make a twinning or partnership

9.1. Introduction

This guide assumes that the twinning or partnership will take the form of a training, information or technical exchange. If instead, your school decides to make collaboration on a specific initiative, most of the steps described will still apply, but one or two may be redundant or need to be modified.

9.2. The investigation stage

The investigation stage is when someone comes up with the idea to make a twinning or partnership activity, making the necessary preparations in your school, identifying sources of funding, searching for one or more potential partners, and making an agreement with a partner school.

9.2.1. Get the idea

In an ideal world, the process will start with a small group in the school doing some investigation and getting a good idea, and then discussing this idea with the other staff and with the management.

9.2.2. Needs and capacity assessment of your school

If your school has decided that the idea of making a twinning or partnership is good and that it should be further investigated how it could be realized, it is now the right moment to conduct a needs and capacity assessment – this means, that you should identify your school's needs (the areas where you find it would be interesting to have an activity with a foreign school) and strengths (the skills and resources your school can share with colleagues).

Maybe you already know the term “needs assessment”. A needs assessment consists of gathering information before planning a project, so that you can be confident that your project is responding to a real need. A capacity assessment is very similar, except that it looks at strengths rather than needs.

For these assessments you need to find the answers to some very simple but crucial questions:

- a. Where are we weak in relation to our current activities? Where are we lacking in knowledge and skills? Where could we use some help?
- b. Are there some activities we would like to start but have not yet started, because we do not yet have the knowledge or skills at the needed level. What knowledge or skills could we use?
- c. Where are our strengths? Where do we excel? What knowledge and skills could we pass on to other schools?

To get these answers you could organize a brainstorming session, distribute a questionnaire or use a combination of both approaches.

The brainstorming session could involve staff who will be involved in the activity, and in some cases learners and social partners. It is a good idea to distribute the questions before the session and ask the participants to think about the questions. It is also important to explain the context to the participants – why the needs and capacity assessments are being done.

A questionnaire could be distributed to staff, (learners and social partners where appropriate) and the responses should then be compiled and analysed.

9.2.3. Agree on the goals

The information from the needs and capacity assessments should enable your school to establish clear goals for the twinning or partnership project. These goals will express what you hope to achieve and what you can offer or give. It is important to establish goals early in the process, though the goals may be modified when you start having contacts and discussions with your potential partners. Later in the process, you will need to define more specific objectives.

Goals and objectives – what is the difference?

A **goal** is a general statement of what the end result will be – that is, what the project is trying to achieve.

Example:

Improve the skills of the tutors delivering the tourism technician programme in developing and applying new student oriented teaching and learning materials.

An **objective** is a more precise statement of what the project will do to achieve the goal.

Examples:

1. Prepare a teaching and learning material for key terms in English used in travel agencies, based on e-twinning by 20 October 2007.
2. Conduct a pilot e-twinning exercise using the new material between x school and x partner school in November 2007.

Objectives need to be specific, measurable and attainable within a specific time frame.

9.2.4. Confirm that your school is committed and ready

Before going any further, you need to make sure that your school is clear about why it wants to get involved in twinning and partnerships and that it has a strong desire to start it.

You should verify that your school has the ability to take on a twinning project. Does it have the needed time, space and resources?

As part of this process, you may want to consider altering your school's mission statement to incorporate the sharing of experiences with schools abroad. If this is already the case, you may want to incorporate the international dimension in your multi-annual and annual strategy planning. If this is already the case, you are doing fine!

9.2.5. Identify the staff who will be involved

At this point at the latest, you should find out which person in your organization will take the lead on this project. It is a good idea to identify a second person to assist the project leader or manager and to be available for back up. As the project develops further, you may want to add more staff to the team. The selection process is very important. You want to ensure that the right people are selected for this task.

Ideally, you should select persons with:

- Good project management skills
- Good interpersonal skills
- Good language skills
- Good ICT skills
- Experience from other projects and/or training in project development and management
- Strong interest in and possibly experience from international collaboration and aspects

- Expressed interest in working with schools in other countries and
- A desire to take up new challenges.

9.2.6. Identify possible sources of funding

You should have a fairly good idea at an early stage of whether funding for twinning and partnerships is or will be available in your school or whether, which is more likely, you will need to approach an external funder. If you are going to need external funding, you should identify the potential funder or funders and you should be satisfied that there is a reasonable prospect of obtaining the funds.

9.2.7. Identify potential partner schools

You may already have one or more schools in mind, based on discussions that have already taken place, on people you or colleagues have met through visits or conferences, or via internet contacts. If not, you need to identify potential partners. At this stage, it can be a good idea to identify two or more potential partners to maximize your chances of success. You may wish to consider some of the following factors, when deciding where to look.

- **Compatibility in profile and interests**

You may want to restrict your search to schools that are of a similar nature, that have similar profiles and interests, or where there are regional and economic aspects that are interesting to your school partnership development strategy.

- **Language compatibility**

You have to be able to communicate with your partner, so language considerations are important. Remember to take into account language capabilities in your own school. Some staff in your school may speak languages other than English and German, and this might be an excellent basis for collaboration. Do not be too quick to make assumptions about the language capabilities of potential partners. In fact, you should confirm the language skills of all project participants in both schools.

- **Travel distances**

If funding is severely limited, this could be an important factor.

- **How do you find a partner?**

See the Annexes.

9.2.8 Contacting potential partners

Now is the time to contact and explore a possible match with potential partner schools. First, you need to find out if they are interested. Then you need to exchange information on your respective needs and capacities to find out if a match would be suitable.

It is important for you school to develop a good understanding of potential partner schools – the profiles they offer, the areas they want to develop, their interests, and also their community and region, if it has a potential for your school and region etc.

9.2.9. Select one school and get their agreement to proceed

You need to select the school that you want to partner with. Then you need to reach an agreement in principle with that school to proceed with the planning of a twinning or partnership project.

It is very important to establish a relationship with your potential partner school. So if you are not contacting a school you already know point 9.2.8. and 9.2.9. may take considerable time – in some cases perhaps several months. It depends on the character and size of the project.

9.2.10. Select the form(s) of twinning or partnership

In consultation with your new partner school, you will need to select the form or forms of twinning or partnership that you will engage yourself in. Which form of twinning or partnership makes sense for both the schools? The answers to these questions will depend primarily on the needs and capacities of your school and of your partner school. Therefore, good self-assessment and well-functioning communication are essential tools for helping you decide.

10. Planning

Now that you have an agreement in principle with your partner school, you need to do some formal planning. This point rehearses the main steps in planning. Please be aware that these steps will not always happen in the precise chronological order as given below. Also there may be some overlap between steps.

10.1. General outline of project

The outline should include:

- The proposed goal(s) and objective(s)
- A brief description of the form of twinning or partnership and the proposed activities
- The proposed time frames
- An estimate of the costs
- Tentative plans for securing the necessary funding and
- A list of all the resources each school is bringing to the partnership, including which persons from each school will be involved and how.

The outline should be prepared jointly by both schools.

Exploratory visits

Although an exploratory visit to your partner school during the planning stage would be optimal, it may not be possible due to funding constraints. Good relationships can still be developed through the modern information and communication technologies. In this connection the added value of a good and informative international website cannot be overestimated.

10.2. Get agreement on the general outline of the project

Both schools need to formally approve the general outline.

10.3. Next step - the detailed project plan

The plan should include:

- The goals and objectives of the project
- The roles and responsibilities of both organizations
- An action plan, showing all activities and time frames for their implementation
- A detailed budget showing what each school will cover in terms of resources
- A fundraising strategy
- A list of the persons from each school who will be involved
- The expected results and the success indicators
- A monitoring and reporting strategy and
- An evaluation strategy

The plan should spell out exactly what the role of each school will be in the project, including in areas such as logistics, administration, provision of equipment for training, preparation of documentation and reports and communication and ICT.

The detailed project plan needs to be considerably more detailed than the general outline mentioned above.

10.4. Agree with the partner school on the detailed plan

Both the schools should approve the detailed project plan. You may want to draw up a formal agreement for the two schools to sign. Consider including a clause allowing either school to put out of the arrangement if its circumstances change.

10.5. Obtain the necessary funding

If you do not already have the required funding within your schools, you will need to approach one or more potential funders. Depending on the requirements of the funders, you may want to make your initial approach (or even your final approach) earlier in the process, perhaps after the two organizations have agreed on the general outline. It is important to ensure that you start exploring possible funding before you enter into any formal agreements.

You may need to develop a project proposal to submit to a potential funder or a donor organization. Each donor has its own standard formats for project applications. It is therefore a good idea to check if your project idea falls within the objective of the donor's programme and to ask to receive information materials and application templates at an early stage, so that you take into account the special requirements of the donor from the start. Be aware that some programmes are based on co-financing on the side of the applicants. This is for instance valid for the EC's Grants. Schools that participated in the VET reform programme's phase 1 Innovation Fund have experience with grant based project funding.

11. Implementing your twinning or partnership project

When the preparations described above have been successfully completed, you are ready to implement your twinning or partnership project. The implementation should generally follow the standard project management practices. Below you will find some suggestions with special reference to twinning and partnership projects.

11.1. Cultural understanding

When you are working with colleagues from another culture, the fact that you are working in the same field, namely education and training, and maybe even in the same sector and even same type of profile is an excellent basis for mutual understanding. Nevertheless, you should not forget that there are still cultural differences at a subtle level which you should be aware of.

11.2. Monitoring and reporting

How do you know if your project is on track? You will need to monitor the project on an ongoing basis. Monitoring is a continuous process of collecting and analyzing information on the implementation of a project. Monitoring can tell you if the activities have been implemented according to your plan.

Monitoring involves:

- Reviewing the action plan to verify that planned activities are being carried out and that there are no serious delays.
- Reviewing the budget to verify that the project is staying within budget
- Verifying that progress is being made towards accomplishing the goals of the project and
- Identifying whether any problems have arisen in the implementation of the project.

If there are any difficulties, like if the project is falling behind schedule, if expenses are too high, if progress is not being made in attaining the goals or if any problems have occurred during implementation, then corrective action needs to be taken. This could include making some changes to the action plan.

Reporting is part of the monitoring process. Progress reports should be prepared at regular intervals during the project. The reports should contain information on the same four elements identified above:

- The status of the action plan
- The status of the budget
- Progress towards accomplishing the goals of the project and
- Problems that have arisen in the implementation of the project

The progress reports should also describe the corrective action that has been taken to address any difficulties.

Progress reports can also be used to keep the funder informed and to disseminate information about the twinning project within the partner schools and to other organizations.

Once the project is completed, a final report should be prepared. It should include a section on lessons learned and recommendations for future twinning and partnership projects. Be sure to share the final reports with your colleagues at both schools and with your project network. Your project network includes all organizations that have supported and contributed to your project. You can also organize a dissemination seminar for other schools in the same sector or in your town or region in order to share your experiences with them.

If your project involves internships or practice placements, it is a good idea to ask the persons involved to prepare two reports – a “final” report immediately after the end of their placement in the partner school or foreign company and a follow-up report several months later. In the follow-up report, they can describe the extent to which they have been able to apply the knowledge learned during their stay in the partner school or company.

11.3. Preparations by the hosting school

If your school is hosting staff from your partner school, here are a few suggestions concerning how to prepare for their visit:

- Remember to make arrangements for accommodations and possibly meals. Schools involved in twinning and partnerships sometimes cut down on costs by accommodating their visitors in school boarding facilities or in training hotels or even in private homes. The last option is only advisable if ALL the involved parties are agreeing to this. Experience shows that this option is more likely to be acceptable if a partnership relation has already existed for some time so that personal friendships may have developed between individuals.
- In advance of the visit, send your visiting colleagues sufficient information on your country, visa requirements, currency exchange rates, addresses and telephone numbers of accommodation, logistics and other practical information which will help them to settle in quickly in the new environment. With modern ICT the task of informing has become so much easier because you can draw on all the available resources on the World Wide Web and easily send even large files with photos etc in just a few seconds.
- Organise a briefing session at the start of the visit to introduce your visiting colleagues to your school and other organizations if appropriate.
- Consider organizing some social and leisure activities for your visitors so that their visit becomes a complete experience.

11.4. Preparations by the visiting colleagues

Some general suggestions on how to prepare for the visit:

- Does your homework before you leave in terms of reading up on all the information provided by the partner school on their own school, its activities and their community? If the information you have received is a bit slim, you can supplement it by surfing on the internet.
- Bring appropriate information from home. Make sure that documents needed in English, German, Hungarian etc are translated well and quality controlled.

12. Evaluating your twinning or partnership project

Evaluation is a critical component of any twinning or partnership project. You need to know what worked and what did not work. Evaluations conducted during the course of a twinning or partnership project can result in modifications to the project action plan. Evaluations conducted at the end of a twinning project can influence planning for future projects.

See the annexes for more information.

13. Dealing with conflict

Your school needs to be prepared to deal with conflict, should it arise during the project. Partners in a twinning or partnership project bring with them different preferences, histories, communication patterns and experiences with decision making. So, some conflict may well occur.

Conflict is not necessarily a bad thing: Often, lack of conflict means that issues are buried instead of being dealt with openly. By not allowing conflict, we limit our ability to change.

In the annexes you will find a short checklist of Sources of conflict and How to resolve conflict.

Annex 1 E-twinning – some models of collaboration for inspiration³

E-twinning is a relatively new concept but it has already proven its value. The EC started its e-twinning initiative in 2004 and now the number of schools that have registered and use the provided facility has exceeded 23,400. This number includes schools from primary school level to secondary schools -(19 years of age).

E-twinning is here understood broader as setting up a collaboration project that is pedagogically relevant to learners or relevant to the development of the school and its services broadly speaking. In contrast to classical twinning and partnership projects where people are moving from one country to the other with substantial costs incurred, the e-twinning projects can be implemented at a very low cost. If school partners agree to work with components from e-learning platforms like webboards, additional costs can be incurred, but basically, e-twinning can be done by any school who has a few computers, an internet subscription and committed staff and learners.

In the following you will see a list of some typical models of collaboration that have already been tested by EU schools plus a few new ones:

Whole school twinning:

- **Linked to town twinning**

An EU and a Serbian town have agreed to set up a town twinning scheme. Two VET schools in each their town agree to set up an e-twinning project in order to create synergy with the overall town twinning.

- **Linked to long term exchanges**

Two partner schools have organized trips and exchanged tutors and learners for many years. The e-twinning gives an opportunity to go further in terms of information and communication technology and pedagogical experiences.

- **Linked to other EU programmes and actions**

Two schools are already linked by another action within an EU programme. E-twinning allows them to strengthen already existing bonds with their partners.

- **New partnership**

Due to the influence of a head teacher and / or a group of teachers or because of a change in training policies or the regional economic development, a school wishes to set up a global school partnership to develop the European or international dimension of the whole staff.

³ Models based partly on the ECs website for etwinning:
www.etwinning.net/ww/en/pub/etwinning/ideas_and_practice/models.htm

All the following examples can be integrated in any whole school partnership or they can be run separately, if a whole school partnership has not been set up.

School management twinning

- Peer to peer project on school organizational issues
- Mutual exchange and dialogue on decision-making issues
- Organisation of a whole school twinning project

Teacher twinning:

- Curricular option

Teachers of the same profile or subject or module in different countries bring a European dimension to the learning process.

- Cross-curricular option

Teachers of different subjects tackle a theme, where their subjects complement one another.

- Activity based

Two teachers set up a common collaborative event.

- Peer to peer training

Two teachers exchange experiences about methodology, pedagogy, use of ICT, or didactics. The exchange can include joint development of learning objects and teaching and learning materials. This option can be integrated within all the others.

Teacher team twinning:

- Curricular option

Two or more sets of teachers of the same subject work together on a common theme and compare different approaches linked to cultural and curricular / methodological differences.

- Cross-curricular option

Groups of teachers of different subjects work together on a common theme, for instance a new module.

- Multi-curricular option

Several classes of learners work on a project that involves teachers of a number of subjects.

Librarian twinning

Two librarians exchange resources and methodology for better school information services.

Twinning of ICT teachers

Two ICT teachers exchange resources and approaches for more professional integration of ICT in the learning process

Twinning of webmasters

Two webmasters exchange design ideas and develop a joint twinning website for the schools combined with interactive facilities.

Guidance and counselling twinning

- European mobility

Two guidance counsellors implement a guide for students looking for work or further study possibilities in the partner country.

School supervisor twinning

- Links between communities / parents and schools

Two supervisors explore and compare topics such as violence at school, parent relationship or accessibility issues and suggest ways to improve school life in the countries.

Annex 2: How to find relevant information on the www

EU institutions

EU programmes and actions – harvesting their best practices

The Leonardo programme:

http://ec.europa.eu/education/programmes/leonardo/news_en.html

The award winning projects (Graz projects)

<http://ec.europa.eu/education/programmes/leonardo/doc/grazprojects.pdf/>

Web links of all the Leonardo offices of EU member states can be found on the first page of this publication:

<http://ec.europa.eu/education/programmes/leonardo/doc/grazambassadors.pdf/>

Relevant links:

http://ec.europa.eu/education/programmes/leonardo/links_en.html/

1. Main door to EU programmes relevant to partnerships and twinning:

http://ec.europa.eu/dgs/education_culture/index.html

with links to the relevant portals of main activity areas and further links to the European E-learning initiative and PLOTEUS (The portal on learning opportunities throughout Europe).

2. Leonardo

3. United Kingdom website on global school partnerships

DFID Global School Partnerships

<http://www.britishcouncil.org/globalschools-partnership-advice.htm>

4. E-learning Europe

<http://www.elearningeuropa.info>

Click “Practice” for information on best practice. For instance the EU research initiative on school networks EU-RIPIDES

http://www.elearningeuropa.info/index.php?page=doc&doc_id=7965&doclng=6&menuzone=1

<http://www.eu-ripides.net/cms/content/view/60/48/lang.en/>

5. EC web portal on town twinning

http://ec.europa.eu/towntwinning/index_en.html

This portal has many valuable materials related to approaches, projects and best practices. The best town twinning projects called “The golden stars” are presented. Try for instance this project with the objective of promoting partnership links in education between Leeds in England and Brno in the Czech Republic.

http://ec.europa.eu/towntwinning/gs_2006/leeds_en.pdf

6. Partnerships with other schools and the local economy

Website for the Council for Corporate and School Partnerships established in 2001 and funded by Coca-Cola has many good ideas and tools for creating closer links with the local economy.

**The EU Study Visit Activity
Spring 2007**

**Empowering pilot schools to
Implement the VET reform**

Introduction

The objective of the Study Visit Activity

The wider objective of the EU study visit activity is to give selected pilot school staff the opportunity to visit an EU school and study how the school functions and interacts with the local community, its development strategies and international relations.

The more specific objective is to see and discuss with peers about Best Practice in the implementation of curricula and new teaching and learning methodologies within one or two profiles that are comparable to those that the pilot schools are currently developing.

Topics

The current reform of VET in Serbia is putting a special focus on the introduction of more practical skills training, integration of theory and practice and the close collaboration between schools and local companies.

Preparation for the visits

An official letter has been sent to schools in Austria, Germany, France and Greece, asking them to be hosting schools.

Selection of participants for the visit

See attached form. The very last deadline for the submission of names of proposed participants to the PIU is 12 March. As this is the first official contact between the schools, the school manager will participate. The school manager will be heading each school group. It is also foreseen that the CATs are eligible due to their special role in the reform implementation.

Due to the special focus of the study visit on curriculum implementation, teachers who will participate in the pilot implementation of the new curricula are eligible. In this connection teachers who have already actively participated in the curriculum development groups will have a priority status.

Contact to partner school

As soon as the hosts have been confirmed, the pilot schools will receive information materials concerning the school they will visit so that they can start contacting their partner school in order to agree on:

- a. dates for the visit
- b. programme with mini project

Mini project

In order to stimulate the dissemination of what each school has learned during their visit, it was decided to build a mini-project into each study visit. The mini-project will focus on a specific topic, of interest to both the Serbian and the EU school.

Examples of project topics that are relevant for the context of the VET reform programme are:

1. Overall planning and organisation of students' practical work;
2. Linkages between school and social partners,
3. Learning and teaching methods (especially project work)
4. Evaluation of students' learning achievements;
5. Personal and environmental safety ensured in school workshops;

The topic of the mini-project will be agreed between each Serbian and EU host school. The topic will be endorsed by the EU sector expert from the VET reform programme as being relevant in the context of the reform.

The pilot and host schools can freely decide between themselves how they want to conduct and in which form they wish to report the mini-project. The only condition is that it will not exceed the limits of the available budget for the visit. More detail will be provided when the host schools have been confirmed.

Dissemination

Sharing the experiences of the study visits will be done in two ways:

1. Through a dissemination activity at each pilot school. The schools will be asked to present their planning for this event.
2. A joint dissemination event between the participants

After the visits the pilot schools will meet with the colleagues in their sector in a workshop, where they will share the results of their visit and project. In this way it is hoped that the essential information gained by all schools can be shared actively.

Website

The study visit activity will have its own dedicated web pages linked to the www.vetserbia.edu.yu website. The website will contain information and links related to the EU, the host countries and the sectors in those countries, the EU host schools and other relevant information. The EU schools are invited to contribute with links and information that are relevant for their colleagues in Serbia and vice versa. The pilot and EU schools will be informed as soon as the web pages are up and running.

The visit

The overall budget which is available for the study visit activity is limited. The available funding makes it possible to make the following framework for the visit:

Duration including travel:	Maximum 6 overnights
Visiting school staff:	Maximum 5 staff of which one will act as translator

The VET reform programme will cover the following indicative costs directly from the office in Belgrade:

- international economy return travel
- travel insurance
- visa
- accommodation, meals and local travel

The below mentioned indicative costs will be covered by the hosting school and reimbursed by the project office upon submission of documentation:

- organizational costs in the partner school (coverage of documented staff costs incurred net, without overhead)
- materials and communication

EU schools who agree to host the visit of a Serbian school will receive more detailed information on the specifics of the agreement and the related conditions.

The participating host schools will be asked to submit a budget for approval as part of a study visit agreement.

Timing of the visit

It is foreseen that the visit to the host country will take place at a time which is more convenient for the Serbian and hosting schools in the period between 1 April and 25 May 2007.