

From a Database to a Pool of Expertise

The **Trainers'** Pool of the Youth Directorate of the Council of Europe

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A dive into the pool

Since the creation of its training programme in 1979, the Youth Directorate has always made use of external tutors for the running of the programme of the European Youth Centres (EYC Strasbourg since 1979, EYC Budapest since 1995). The expertise of youth organisations has been sought to complement the work of the tutors of the European Youth Centres and bring in grassroots experience from youth workers and trainers. The emergence of more specialised training needs and the continuous recruitment of external tutors has entailed the necessity of a new system through which those needs can be catered for.

The trainers' pool today

The trainers' pool is in fact a database of trainers who have worked with the Youth Directorate (YD) in the past or have shown an interest in working with the YD on the educational programme (training courses or study sessions). The 'pool' is an accessible open list, which can also be consulted by outside bodies in so far as the trainers themselves have given their agreement to this use being made of their inclusion in the database.

The database includes information about the trainers' formal educational backgrounds, their experience of training at European level and their specific areas of expertise. More detailed information is contained in questionnaires which are regularly updated with new indications from the side of the applicants. Often the applicant trainers also include a more elaborate CV, which can be consulted on the spot in the Youth Directorate. No formal criteria have been established for applying to be part of

the pool. The fact of being in the database does not guarantee that the applicant will eventually be contracted by the Council of Europe.

The educational staff of the Youth Directorate select the trainers for upcoming activities (in consultation with its partners, the European Youth Forum and European Commission for partnership activities) and contacts them. The actual composition of training teams is decided by the educational staff. Once the trainers have been contacted, a contract is established with them. At that point, certain criteria closely connected with the particular job expected of them have to be fulfilled. This job may consist in being a member of the preparatory team of a training course run by the Youth Directorate or within the partnership with the European Commission, or of being the 'external tutor' for one of the study sessions run under the Educational programme of the European Youth Centres. These jobs can require fairly distinct profiles.

Running a study session on a specific topic (e.g. unemployment, vocational training, students' representation in universities, etc.) as the only trainer and representative of the educational team in the preparatory group of a single youth organisation requires a different approach than being part of a training team of trainers, devoted to the running of a course which is open to a variety of organisations.

Set criteria

The basic criteria for contracting trainers from the pool are threefold and relate to (i) the training skills of the applicant, (ii) knowledge and experience and (iii) concern and availability of the trainer.





The training skills have to do with the trainer's ability to design, run and evaluate a training course. Is the trainer able to perform an analysis of training needs and apply learning theory to the course design? To what extent is the trainer able to make learning fun, 'perform' adequately in front of a group, create and conduct exercises, lead discussions?

Knowledge and experience refer to the expertise in the subject matter of the training. This not only implies academic qualifications but also practical 'on the job' experience - especially valid in non-formal education and the youth sector. Important in this context are also the trainer's theoretical competence and his/her knowledge of the training function.

The concern and availability of the trainer are linked to the group of participants and to the preparatory team and to the fellow trainers. They have to do with the trainer's attitudes towards 'the other', with empathy, listening skills and the ability to adapt the style and content of the training to the trainees' needs.

Skills and knowledge are important. But as important are the trainer's reasons for doing the training. For the Council of Europe, it is essential that the trainer knows and supports the values of the Council of Europe, and European construction in general: human rights, pluralist democracy, active citizenship, the rule of law, the protection of minorities, non-violence and European and international co-operation. In addition, a strong commitment to the role and function of multilateral and multi-organisational youth work in all its forms is required on the part of the trainers in performing their tasks.

Finally, trainers - especially those working on study-sessions of EYC's programme - need to have some administrative skills and practical knowledge about procedures inside the EYCs.

Measuring competence

It is, of course, very hard to make a sound, objective judgement about the above elements on the basis of an application form completed by the applicant-trainer, and, in fact, very few trainers are actually recruited 'out of the blue'. The trainers involved in our programmes usually have long-standing experience of the EYCs and, in most cases, have themselves participated as trainees in at least one YD training course. But this, in itself, is not sufficient. Trainers are also required to bring along their own formal and non-formal educational background and experience in their hand-luggage.

It is quite natural that some trainers can be found in the existing trainers' pools of other European and national institutions, services and platforms that are active in the field of multilateral training. The knowledge and experience required as well as the trainer-skills, are not always readily available in every country and organisation.

In order to give newcomers in the trainers' pool a chance to broaden their skills before being the only ones in charge of a training course or study session, the YD has established a system of senior and junior trainers. Junior trainers are those trainers who have the potential to grow, and are interested in doing so. They are willing to acquire new trainer skills and improve their experience and are given the chance to do so while being backed up in experienced trainers' teams. Formal criteria have been elaborated in the YD to clarify the difference between junior and senior trainers. They serve as a basis for the establishment of the contractual relationship between the trainer and the Council of Europe.

Perspectives

Some developments in the YD will lead to a higher use of the trainers' pool in the future.

The first development is the changeover of the 'tutors' posts in the YD to posts of 'educational advisors'. This change of name will also alter the job content of the persons recruited for these jobs. It will most certainly imply a lower involvement in the direct implementation of the educational programme and a higher investment in the overall functions of the YD as well as a better exploitation of the results of its work. The educational advisors will be given more tasks in the transversal aspects of the mission of the YD, and in the co-operation with other Directorates of the Council of Europe.

The second development is the shift in the educational resources that are made available for study sessions. In 1999, two-thirds of the study sessions in the EYCs are being run without an EYC tutor. This will be largely the same for the year 2000 and implies that around 20 to 25 activities will be run with an external trainer or tutor. The same goes for the running of the training course programme, which saw a substantial (50%) reduction of the involvement of tutors.

The third development is increased co-operation with the European Commission on European Youth Worker Training and the establishment of a joint training programme within the frame of the concept of 'European Citizenship'.

This increase of the use of the trainers' pool will have consequences on the initial 'database': it will have to be turned into a real pooling of knowledge and expertise. This will also imply giving the pool some kind of a 'life of its own', involving meetings/training for the trainers involved, regular information updates (e.g. via Coyote) and more established contacts with the Youth Directorate.

In the planning of 2000, a first "trainers' forum" has been budgeted. This forum will be an

occasion to further clarify trainers' needs and wishes as well as the expectations from the side of the YD. Coyote could be used as a forum of exchange of thoughts on this event and the expectations from the side of the trainers.

It is also planned that the trainers involved in the training activities of the Youth programmes, co-financed by the European Commission, could become part of a joint trainers' pool on European Youth Worker Training between the European Commission and the Council of Europe. A joint management of this pool of trainers would be most advisable, including joint selection criteria and 'recruitment' policy. The first steps in this direction have already been taken in the frame of the partnership agreement.

Conclusion

The trainers' pool of the Youth Directorate is in constant expansion. It is becoming a tool of the educational policy of the Youth Directorate. There are several possibilities for making the pool more tangible: Coyote, trainers' pool meetings and consultative meetings. For the year 2000, a more structured approach is planned as well as higher interaction with the existing networks of trainers of other European institutions and platforms, in particular those of the European Commission and the European Youth Forum. To be continued!

