



SENNET ACTIVITY REPORT

ANNUAL REPORT NO. 1

NOVEMBER 2012



The SENnet project is partly financed by the European Commission's Lifelong Learning Programme

Project information	
Project acronym:	SENnet
Project title:	Special Education Needs Network
Project number:	518426-LLP-1-2011-1-BE-COMENIUS-CNW
Sub-programme or KA:	Comenius Multilateral Network
Project website:	http://sennet.eun.org/
Report version:	Final
Date of preparation:	November 2012
Beneficiary organisation:	EUN Partnership AISBL (European Schoolnet)
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ABSTRACT

The Special Educational Needs network (SENnet: <http://sennet.eun.org>) part-funded by the European Commission's Lifelong Learning programme, delivers each year an Annual Report describing its activities in the three areas of activity in the network: the integration of learners with special needs into mainstream schools, innovative learning environments and raising teacher awareness. This first report describes key developments in 2012.

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INTRODUCTION

The Special Educational Needs network (SENnet: <http://sennet.eun.org>) part-funded by the European Commission's Lifelong Learning programme, is a network of education ministries, national agencies and key organisations working in the area of ICT to improve access to learning for students with special educational needs (SEN).

The network delivers each year an Annual Report describing its activities in the three areas of activity in the network: the integration of learners with special needs into mainstream schools, innovative learning environments and raising teacher awareness. This first report describes key developments in 2012, D6.1, and includes contributions from partners in Austria, Belgium, Denmark, Estonia, Italy, Portugal, Turkey and the United Kingdom, as well as from European Schoolnet and the European Agency for Development in Special Needs Education.

Further information about SENnet can be found at <http://sennet.eun.org>. The authors welcome comments and can be contacted at the address above.

RESEARCH AND ANALYSIS

This aspect of SENnet (Work Package 2) aims to inform policy and practice on the base of empirical evidence of the current and emerging trends on good practices in Special Education. Activities lead to two outputs: thematic studies and an annual report on innovation.

THEMATIC STUDIES

Each year partners agree on one or more thematic orientations relating to using ICT to support learners with SEN in innovative ways and undertake desk-based research to identify, translate, document, summarise, compare and analyse research, studies and good practices in their own and other countries. The detail of topics, order of the studies, and lead author is agreed at the first meeting of the network and revised annually.

Studies are conducted from a qualitative perspective utilizing methods such as group discussions, semi-structured interviews and questionnaires. Results are consolidated and are presented in the form of published studies, using standard EUN templates already widely known and respected, including cross-country comparisons. The good practices are published online and available for printing as PDFs; online versions include video clips. They follow a similar format, e.g. review and analysis of the state of affairs, identification of factors and good practice case studies, comparison across countries and conclusions and recommendations.

Draft papers are presented and discussed in sessions within the WP6 activities across the national contexts. Collaborative peer reflection on the literature and resource research by the network and the community provides in deep insights into good practices and lessons learned. The Network works closely, where possible, with the FP7 iTEC classroom of the future project and its work on scenarios and large-scale piloting.

In 2012, the first year of the network, partners agreed on the topic of **integrating students with special needs into mainstream classes: the role of ICT**. The topic was led by INDURE (Italy) and discussed at workshops during the year (described in the section on dissemination and exploiting results). A template was agreed for partners to use for collecting evidence and reporting good practices and producing video clips.

The resulting report (77 pages, available on the SENnet website resources [area](#)) is divided into two parts: Part 1 focuses on European and national countries partners' policies for the integration of students with special educational needs (SEN) in mainstream education through the use of ICT and Part 2 concentrates on case studies dealing with school integration or assessment of SEN students. In Part 2, recent European and national developments are described, including recent research activities and studies, policy trends for ICT and SEN pupils; recent legislative developments on this topic. These are followed by examples of interesting projects and research activities concerning SEN inclusion with ICT at a national/local level on the following topics:

- 1) Assessment of SEN pupils with different disabilities at different school levels.

- 2) SEN students with different disabilities and the use of specific software and assistive technology.

To illustrate the report, and bring the case studies to life, partners produced six short videos sub-titled in English and identified others which were already available and related to the topic (listed in the SENnet site resources [area](#)).

Topics identified in 2013 are Universal Design for Learning and learning disorders and serious games for students with disabilities.

ANNUAL REPORTS ON SEN INNOVATION

The second area of activity on research and analysis relates to the state of innovation in the area covered by the Network, i.e. particular reference to innovative approaches to mainstreaming learners with SEN of compulsory school age, improving access to digital resources, raising teachers' awareness, and the role of ICT.

The 2012 [report](#) describes innovative approaches at international and national level in the three areas of the network's activity: the integration of learners with special needs into mainstream schools, innovative learning environments and raising teacher awareness. This first report draws on material prepared by network members for workshops and activities in 2012 and includes contributions from partners in Austria, Belgium, Denmark, Estonia, Italy, Portugal, Turkey and the United Kingdom, as well as from European Schoolnet and the European Agency for Development in Special Needs Education.

In 2013 data will be included from European Schoolnet's Insight country report survey. This is a questionnaire completed by education ministries and in 2013, for the first time, includes questions related to special needs education.

ACCESS TO DIGITAL RESOURCES

The aim of this area of the network's activity is to improve the availability of and access to online resources to support learners with special needs.

In Work Package 3, led by UNI-C (Denmark), partners address technical and other issues in providing access to and improving the availability across Europe of freely available digital learning resources for special needs pupils, particularly for those integrated into mainstream education.

In 2012 discussions took place online and at workshops on specific issues when using multimedia resources for students with disabilities (e.g. access, usability. A first task was to investigate if there are existing vocabularies that can be used or whether the project needs to develop and translate them.). Partners discussed and evaluated the approaches and recommended a way forward for improving access to resources, particularly those in the [Learning Resource Exchange](#), which brings together ('federates') collections and repositories of digital resources from across Europe. This led to the production of a report on the issues, different approaches to accessibility and international standards and vocabularies. At the same time, useful collections of resources, and specific tools and applications are assessed and if useful, highlighted in the [resources area](#) of the SENnet website.

In 2013 technical work will proceed on identifying and making more content available, using a [wiki](#) to support discussions. A technical document setting out how the Access for All standards can be adapted for the LRE will be produced and implemented, enabling partners to tag resources on the Learning Resource Exchange a greater number of resources (target 200 resources D3.3) than at present, including learning materials and resources for teachers and school managers. There will also be an international survey of digital learning content, including lesson plans, suitable for learners with SEN in national repositories with some form of open licence and through partners' contributions.

RAISING AWARENESS AND DEVELOPING TEACHER COMPETENCES

The aim of this area of SENnet work is to develop online professional development materials for teachers and build a community of practice around them.

In 2012, working with a community of practitioners and experts, Work Package 4, led by DGE (Portugal) developed, trialled and published online training modules for teachers. The main characteristics for a model of an online training tool are defined drawing on the case studies and good practices identified in WP2. The outcome is a set of online modules that can be adapted and translated for use in different countries, contexts and users. Prototype modules have been tested with small groups of teachers in partner countries. A report is available on the SENnet website describing the content, development and testing of the modules.

In 2013, further testing, translating and piloting will take place in partner countries.

DISSEMINATION, NETWORKING AND EXPLOITATION OF RESULTS

Work Packages 6 and 7, both led by EUN, aim to disseminate the Network's outputs to decision makers and practitioners in education ministries and schools and to make use of the outputs and lessons learnt and continue key activities beyond the core network and duration of its funding.

NETWORKING AND DISSEMINATION

Activities provide a forum for joint reflection and co-operation and a platform for Comenius projects to strengthen co-operation and sustain results.

Themed networking events. Partners and invitees met three times in 2012, in Brussels, Florence and Leuven (Belgium) in joint meetings with European Schoolnet's Special Needs Education Working Group chaired by Jan de Craemer (Belgium Flemish Community Ministry of Education). Attendance was approximately 15 participants and meetings took place over two days, including project management sessions for SENnet partners only (WP1). At the events, the topics and results of WPs 2-4 were presented and discussed. The two meetings outside Brussels included a presentation of the national situation on SEN, networking activities, input from key players and visits to schools / centres. Each workshop had a theme related to SEN (e.g. dyslexia, integration, students in long-term care). Workshops were open to other ministries of education and agencies among the 30 countries represented in the EUN consortium, and to representatives of Comenius SEN projects. Meeting and workshop reports are published in the partner area of the SENnet site.

Online community (see also WP4). An open online community based on a mailing list, thematic wikis (related to the WP topics) and file exchange area on the SENnet website was set up early in the project to facilitate communication and information exchange.

European dissemination

An open access [public website](#) and community (D6.4) was established early in 2012 to support information exchange and dissemination; it includes a home page, a resource area, for project outputs, news, case studies, useful links etc., a partner area, for work in progress and project and document management and a wiki, for partners to work collaboratively on themes and topics. News items were published in European Schoolnet online newsletters (to schools and policy-makers in ministries of education, industry, research, in EN, FR, DE, IT and ES). Work has started on presentation materials for national, regional and local agencies to use and adapt (D6.5), including a project logo. High level contact and co-operation was established with the European Agency for Development in Special Needs Education, DGs of the EC and international organizations engaging in similar activities.

National dissemination

Partners have made inputs and run focused sessions at national conferences on SEN and translated and disseminated nationally to their networks,

In 2013 activities will continue along the lines described above and work will proceed on a SENnet brochure (pdf format and printed), PowerPoint presentation, WP2 studies, and newsletter items.

EXPLOITATION AND SUSTAINABILITY

This WP builds on WP6 and mainstreams SENnet results, leveraging the results within the whole network of policy-makers and practitioners represented the partners. All partners make use of the results of SENnet's activities and lay the foundations for a sustainable and active network.

Cross-border exploitation and sustainability

All EUN member ministry of education representatives were alerted to the publication of public deliverables, invited to WP6 workshops and regularly updated on progress at Steering Committee meetings. Connections were made with EUN associate partners (industry – e.g. Microsoft, Intel, Cisco) and other projects (e.g. iTEC, INSAFE, eTwinning, Future Classroom Lab). The Special Needs Education Working Group continued to operate and its members invited to all SENnet events and activities.

Materials produced (studies, videos, teacher education modules) are made available via the European Schoolnet website, where legacy materials from projects are held in a structured and easily-accessible format.

Closer links with the European Agency for Development in Special Needs Education were developed and this led to EUN's being a partner in ICT4IAL, an accessibility project led by the agency. Key stakeholders were invited to a first special needs seminar in November 2012 at the annual EUN EMINENT conference that attracted over 240 delegates, including senior policy makers, industry representatives, researchers and teachers (D7.2 – Specific workshop). The workshop aimed to enhance interaction between the target groups, including Comenius projects working in the area of SEN in schools, and a report has been published on the SENnet website.

National exploitation and sustainability

Partners began work to sustain SENnet activities where possible, for example on websites where materials are being integrated.

In 2013 there will be a special needs strand at the EMINENT conference (4-5 December, Helsinki) and an exploitation and sustainability plan (D7.1) will be drafted. Before the end of the network's funding period, an exploitation plan will be created, drawing on the outcomes of the project in order to ensure the sustainability of the action and including a sustainability model for continuing activities after the end of the financing period.

MANAGEMENT

MANAGING THE NETWORK

Management of the network is led by EUN (Work Package 1) and involves operational and financial coordination and monitoring of the project progress towards the achievement of the planned outcomes and impact.

Overall management.

In 2012 a partnership agreement was produced and signed by all partners, and an operational workplan was produced and regularly updated by the project manager, Roger Blamire, who also ensured the quality and good implementation of tasks from partners as well as the respect of deadlines, and resolving any disputes. EUN managed financial aspects (checking of cost statements, budgetary follow up and monitoring, etc.), monitored and recorded time spent by personnel and costs incurred, liaised with the Commission and Executive Agency staff. On-going self-evaluation of the results of the project was undertaken in cooperation with project partners.

Three three face to face project partner meetings took place in 2012 as well as ad hoc online meetings on specific issues. Meetings were in conjunction with the WP6 dissemination workshops described above. EUN convened and minuted meetings; the minutes were published on the network web site. The existing EUN SEN Working Group acted as an advisory board (e.g. topics for studies, surveys).

EUN set up, monitored and coordinated a project workspace to collect, share and disseminate project documents and financial information, as well as mechanisms for internal communication (using existing tools used by EUN, e.g. online community, mailing list, conference calls, Flashmeetings, Skype).

In 2013 EUN will provide the EC with a mid-term progress report (D1.1) detailing operational results and the financial management of the grant.

QUALITY ASSURANCE

The aim of this activity, Work Package 5, led by INDIRE, is to put in place, monitor and assess the process and impact of the Network.

In 2012, a quality plan was drafted and discussed by partners before being finalised and adopted. It is based on principles of collaborative and reflective learning, under the scope of managing knowledge from a comprehensive perspective on issues pertaining to SEN, with the engagement of policy, practice, research and social partners. Evaluation of internal performance and external impact is ongoing, making use of existing proven monitoring tools for adaptive feedback that facilitate participants' contributions during the collaborative learning and community building processes, and evaluation tools that give contributors feedback on appreciation parameters.

Quality assurance work will continue in 2013 and to the end of the funding period, and an evaluation report will be published.