



## **ForAge**

### **Forage for later-life learning: building on European experience**

Progress Report

Public Part

## Project information

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## Executive Summary

ForAge is a European multi-lateral network which aims to increase recognition of the value of learning for older people in increasing health, happiness and well-being and in fostering inclusion, participation and intergenerational solidarity. Its purpose is to raise issues around later-life learning, its availability and access, and standards of practice. The network builds upon the rich experiences from European projects and initiatives and elsewhere by analysing their value and impact and disseminating information about them.

### ForAge target audience

The ForAge project is aimed at five communities of target users: (1) policy and decision makers in national, regional and local government; (2) organisations, education providers, teachers and trainers in the field of later-life learning; (3) agencies promoting a better quality of life for older people, involved in e.g. social inclusion, active and healthy ageing, volunteering, intergenerational engagement; (4) older learners; (5) academic and research communities in this field.

### Project objectives

The aim is to be a single access point for information, research and ideas about later-life learning in Europe, connecting different activities and projects. Its goal is to contribute to the research evidence base for later-life learning and to increase access to innovative and progressive ideas and practice. The five key objectives are: (1) to be the initial source of information and ideas for later-life learning activities in Europe; (2) to connect ideas, projects, research and the voices of older people with policy and practice; (3) to develop dialogue with politicians and decision makers on themes and issues in later-life learning; (4) to signpost a lexicon of terms; (5) to sustain the network. The network will have a positive impact upon the user groups in many ways. It will highlight evidence about the benefits of later-life learning, and provide data about policies, testimonies of older learners, and examples of best practice.

### Partners involved in ForAge

The consortium consists of 16 partners from 14 countries with a variety of experience, skills, backgrounds and knowledge. The competences, past collaborative experience and expertise of the partners complement each other and enable the consortium to work together co-operatively and successfully and to produce results of a high standard. The members of the partnership have the ability to disseminate and exploit their work effectively and to produce relevant information for the database.

### Approaches used

ForAge is using a variety of methods, strategies and approaches to meet the network's challenging aims. It is undertaking surveys of partners and others; creating and promoting a database; documenting European projects; promoting collaboration; setting up an online forum; organising three pan-European conferences; producing reports; collecting learning testimonies. The network focuses on collecting and disseminating information and also on bringing insights. The ForAge approach brings added value including critical awareness and innovative thinking. Evaluations use qualitative and quantitative approaches and external reviews. Dissemination uses methods such as the leaflets, newsletters, web site, facebook, discussion forum, communications with target groups, database, results of surveys, pan-European conferences, and promotion in other newsletters and journals. Exploitation focuses on mainstreaming and multiplying the outputs and on sustainability.

### Major achievements to date

The project has achieved much in its first 18 months. The network structures, and the dissemination, exploitation and evaluation plans, are all in place. The survey of partners identified issues, concerns, and themes, and data on connections with agencies, networks,

and projects were collected. The corporate design and logo were agreed and the publicity leaflet was distributed. The web site and database are operational: data are currently structured within the framework of policy, research, theory and practice, commentary, newsletters, EU projects, and other resources. The discussion forum is in use and the project has its own facebook page. Six newsletters have been circulated. Other major achievements include the ForAge pan-European conference on 'A Society for All Ages' held in Cyprus in October 2012.

With regard to the five key project objectives: (1) the successful development of the database – and its increasingly international content – already makes the network an important source of information on European later-life learning; (2) the growth of the database and the results of the ForAge surveys allow the network to connect ideas, research and the voices of older people with policy and practice; (3) ForAge surveys and conferences have put the network in the first stages of dialogue with politicians and decision makers; (4) work on a lexicon of terms is on-going in connection with the development of the database; (5) a strategy is in place which will guide the network as it determines future sustainability.

### **Plans and prospects**

ForAge anticipates further achievements during the next 18 months. The next business meeting in Budapest in October 2013 will consider progress reports and confirm priorities and plans and act as the spring board for the next phase. A forward planning group will help the network build on the dissemination and exploitation plans, lead ideas for sustainability, plan the third ForAge conference, and assist with the final report. The network plans to follow up communications with target groups, to develop further online surveys, and to create more discussions on later-life learning issues such as ethnicity, migration and Roma; arts and creativity; health, well-being and active ageing; the voice of the older learner; employability. The aim will be to summarise existing discussions and to disseminate the findings through the ForAge website, newsletters, social media and e-mails.

The ForAge database will continue to be populated with information, research and ideas; procedures for information retrieval will be developed; thematic analyses will be undertaken of database content. Dissemination will be reviewed and increased to improve the network's reach. The interim evaluation report will be discussed at the third business meeting. The second ForAge pan-European conference will take place in Budapest on 30 September and 1 October 2013 with the title 'The Future of Learning for Older People in Europe: Learning from Experience'. The project's exploitation strategy underlines the aim of working towards sustainability. The network's document on 'A Vision for the Future' and the declaration of sustainable support will be discussed at the Budapest meeting. The network plans to bring forward its plans for sustainability for approval at the business meeting in October 2014 in Lisbon.

### **The project web site**

The web pages ([www.foragenetwork.eu](http://www.foragenetwork.eu)) include information about the ForAge network, its activities, news, newsletters, and the forthcoming international conference in Budapest in September/October 2013. It also includes the database and the ForAge Forum.

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# 1. Project Objectives

ForAge is a European multi-lateral network with the central aim of promoting learning for older people. Its goal is to help raise issues around later-life learning, its availability and access, and standards of practice across Europe and beyond. During the recent period, there have been many European exchanges, projects, training events, seminars, programmes, initiatives and networks concerned with learning in later life. ForAge will build upon these rich experiences by analysing them, assessing their value and impact, sharing and disseminating information about them, and creating a new network to help do this.

Later-life learning can bring many benefits for individuals, families, communities and states in Europe. It helps to overcome social exclusion and isolation, and can promote older people's mental and physical health. Adult education may assist in maintaining independence and well-being in later life and it enriches the lives of individuals and communities. The ForAge project aims to examine the most effective ways of realising the benefits of learning for older people and of promoting these activities for wider numbers of people throughout Europe.

## **The aim of ForAge**

The aim of ForAge is to be a single access point for information, research and ideas about later-life learning in Europe, connecting different activities and projects. It seeks to extend recognition of the value of learning for older people as a means of fostering inclusion, participation and intergenerational solidarity. The goal of the network is to contribute to the international research evidence base for later-life learning and to increase access to innovative and progressive ideas and practice in Europe. ForAge aspires 'to put the older learner at the centre'. Wider society and governments need to see how older people should be empowered to make decisions about their own lives. ForAge will encourage an examination of skills, literacies and competences for ageing to be used as processes to help non-participant and socially-excluded older people to feel that education has something to offer.

In terms of learning and education, older people have to negotiate with many different agencies which can be confusing, contradictory and conflicting. ForAge will attempt to persuade these disparate agencies to appreciate that they have a collective responsibility to promote later-life learning and facilitate the means for older people to participate. The network plans to collect examples of older people's education and learning journeys – some of these based on traditional liberal adult education principles with others involving non-education bodies from sectors such as health, social welfare, housing, or finance. By using such examples ForAge will seek to illustrate where there is duplication of effort and resources as well as highlighting examples of practice worthy of replication. Whilst ForAge is primarily about communication, and making data more accessible, the network is also sending targeted communications to reach policy makers and government administrators to raise issues about the quality and quantity of adult education available for older people and to illustrate how successful and cost-effective later-life learning can be.

## **The project's objectives**

The ForAge network is building on the breadth and experience of its partners and their connections to work towards its core goals. These objectives can be summarised under five main headings:

1. To be the initial source of information for later-life learning activities in Europe, with the following objectives:

- To enable better dissemination of project reports and findings;
  - To encourage further use of the results of projects and initiatives to increase learning opportunities available to individuals;
  - To create an archive and access point for European Union and other initiatives concerned with issues and themes that intersect with later-life learning, including: health and well-being, economics, social justice and integration, equality, inter-generational issues, culture, heritage and artistic expression, employment and technology.
  - To provide a source of advice and information to emerging and current European Union programmes, and access to sources of research evidence on the value of later-life learning;
  - To provide regular information on new policy directions;
  - To press and negotiate for standardised methods of data collection and dissemination to assist comparisons, analysis and understanding;
  - To stimulate innovation across bureaucracies, disciplines and sectors;
  - To encourage debate on later-life learning issues that stimulates change.
2. To connect later-life learning ideas, projects, policy, research and the voices of older people, and thereby promote an integrated and coherent approach in future policy and practice.
  3. To develop dialogue with national and European politicians and decision makers concerning emerging themes and issues in later-life learning.
  4. To signpost a lexicon of terms used across Europe and in disciplines relevant to later-life learning.
  5. To develop and sustain the network:
    - To promote dissemination strategies to publicise the ForAge identity and aims;
    - To develop aspects of the network in major European languages;
    - To increase the number of themed debates on the ForAge web pages;
    - To embed strategies to promote the network from the initial stages of its development;
    - To aspire to create a free-standing network and possibly an association for later-life learning in Europe.

## **User communities**

The ForAge network has identified five main communities of target users at which its activities are aimed:

1. Policy and other decision makers at national and regional governmental levels;
2. Organisations, education providers, teachers and trainers working within the field of later-life learning or seeking to do so;
3. Agencies involved in promoting a better quality of life for older people, for example through social inclusion, active and healthy ageing, volunteering and intergenerational engagement;
4. Older learners;
5. Academic and research communities seeking to undertake research informed by the work of ForAge and others who wish to test their findings through ForAge.

These groups include education funders, policy makers and practitioners; age-related organisations and older people's movements; health, welfare, housing, sports and arts

bodies working with and for older people. The activities of the network started initially in various partner countries but are growing to include other countries as the network develops. This should grow and extend as the network takes root and is promoted further.

### **Impact upon the target user communities**

The ForAge network promises to have a positive impact upon the target user groups. ForAge aspires to be the ‘network of networks’ in the field of later-life learning. It will provide an overview of, and access to, data concerning current and recent policy, research evidence about the benefits of later-life learning, testimonies of older learners, and examples of best practice in the creation and implementation of learning opportunities in later life. The potential benefits of learning in later life have become more important as the financial, economic, social, health and human effects of demographic change are being realised across Europe. In addition, the funding for learning through the Grundtvig programme has created many initiatives involving older people the results of which have not always been fully exploited.

## 2. Project Approach

Traditional liberal adult education is about people learning out of interest, not in isolation but as a member of a larger group and of the wider society. Their engagement in learning is about personal development, driven by curiosity, self-reflection and a thirst for knowledge. It is also sometimes related to some form of volunteering or intergenerational activity. This engagement through personal wish rather than through some other motivation, such as work-based training, opens doors to other forms of learning, community engagement and self-fulfilment. There is evidence to show that engagement in learning results in people displaying greater tolerance and understanding.

In some parts of Europe there is a long history of liberal adult education but in others there is reported to be a greater suspicion of education and its purpose amongst many people. In such cases, the conception that education can assist them as they age may be problematic for some older people. In many European countries in recent years learning for adults has come to be seen in a more instrumental way as training in developing skills and competences for employment and for the perceived economic needs of industry and business. Some governments have cut funds for liberal adult education, or 'learning for pleasure', and switched towards learning new skills for employment and business. ForAge is interested in promoting high-quality later-life learning of all kinds and in trying to find ways to enable new groups of older people to participate.

### Methods and activities

The project is using a variety of methods tailored to meet the network's challenging aims and objectives. These include the following activities and ways of operating:

- Undertaking surveys of partners to ascertain their strengths and interests, the other networks of which they are members, their other current activities, expertise and concerns, the agencies they work with and wish to involve in ForAge, and the issues and themes which they consider ForAge should be examining.
- Seeking and analysing data from a wide variety of relevant sources including other networks, partnerships, programmes and agencies and older people themselves, using the web site.
- Creating an on-going, sustainable and accessible database holding information about different aspects of later-life learning, including theory and practice, policy, research, and commentaries.
- Promoting the use of the database for research, analysis, examination by sectors, project building and partner searching.
- Documenting, evaluating and analysing projects at a European level and promoting new ways to utilise their results, whether in a new context or for a new organisation.
- Promoting collaboration and participation on later-life learning across different sectors, for example technology, arts, heritage, employment, volunteering, health and social care.
- Creating links and cross-communication with other relevant European Union networks, projects, programmes and potential partners.
- Improving access to databases of good practice in a range of areas around later-life learning, education and ageing, and training of educators in these fields.
- Offering an online ForAge forum for participation in debates and discussions around central later-life learning topics and issues.
- Enhancing the usage and value of data held on European databases such as EST, EVE and ADAM through publicity, signposting and cross-referencing.

- Organising three pan-European conferences, including plenary sessions and discussion groups, involving participants from the target user communities to share information and knowledge, showcase progress and findings, promote debate on central issues and themes, and to highlight the web site and database.
- Producing reports for key stakeholders to summarise and disseminate the work of ForAge and to exploit its results and findings.
- Collecting learning testimonies to illustrate the benefits of later-life learning and the variety of approaches that can successfully be adopted.

### **Added value**

The ForAge project and the approach it adopts bring added value in various ways. Although the network is focused on collecting and disseminating information and ideas it is also designed to bring insight and understanding. The ForAge approach is intended to promote self-reflection and critical awareness amongst the project's partners as well as amongst the network's target user communities. One dimension of the added value that the project is bringing is to stretch the thinking of those involved to consider new objectives and approaches. ForAge seeks to promote best practice and also to get those involved to look at things afresh. Government agencies and providers, and other organisations working in the field, should be stimulated by the ForAge approach to question what they are and are not doing and to reassess their priorities and activities.

From the political and policy perspectives, ForAge will bring added value in underlining value-for-money questions around later-life learning. To what extent do existing studies show that cost-benefit analysis reveals that the money invested in later-life learning brings positive dividends for the state, for society and communities and for families and individuals? What are the benefits of learning for older people and can they be measured in financial terms, for example by reduced expenditure on pills and medication or other treatment by health services? What fresh and innovative thinking is needed by politicians, political parties and decision makers, in terms of the ageing societies and the benefits of later-life learning? At a time of economic austerity, with increased pressure on budgets, without a better appreciation of the benefits government priorities risk ignoring the real value of learning activities, particularly as a means of promoting social inclusion and active ageing for older people. ForAge will bring added value by throwing the spotlight on to the benefits of later-life learning.

The ForAge network connects later-life learning at multiple levels. As such it should bring other kinds of added value:

- A greater commitment from more European governments and relevant agencies to support and fund later-life learning opportunities with a more cost-effective use of expenditure;
- More programmes which connect with 'hard-to-reach' older people who are not currently benefiting from later-life learning thereby promoting social inclusion;
- Greater collaboration between older learners themselves on the voice they can develop across Europe and how and where they can make themselves heard;
- The availability of a trusted and reliable source of data upon which future EU actions and projects can draw to ensure maximum use is made of what has already been achieved.

### **Evaluation and quality assurance**

The project is firmly committed to achieving high standards in what it does and this commitment to quality assurance and evaluation appears as article 8 in the ForAge Partner Agreement which has been signed by each member of the consortium. Partner 15, the

Multidisciplinary European Research Institute Graz, Austria (MERIG), has the responsibility for evaluation and quality assurance within the ForAge project. The development of an evaluation strategy was discussed at the kick-off meeting in Leicester in February 2012 and a number of aims were agreed. These included: providing feedback from partners to the coordinators and work package leaders to help management; raising awareness about quality within the consortium; pinpointing potential improvements in processes, products and outputs; improving decision making, communications, and transnational business meetings; focusing attention on activities such as dissemination, exploitation, sustainability and the needs of target group and potential users of the network; helping the project to meet its quantitative and qualitative objectives.

The evaluation framework and strategy was agreed by the consortium in April 2012 and discussed again at the business meeting held in Limassol, Cyprus, in October 2012. The meeting confirmed that external evaluation of the project should also be led and organised by Partner 15. Each partner agreed to provide the names and details of a small number of external experts who could review the project's outputs and products. The evaluation strategy makes use of both qualitative and quantitative approaches. These include online questionnaires to gather feedback from the project partners; presentations and evaluation sessions at the partner business meetings; reviews of the project documentation and reports; individual interviews with project personnel from the partnership organisations; monitoring and evaluation of the process of the work in the work packages; questionnaires to gather feedback from participants in conferences and events. The external reviews involve assessments by independent experts.

The results of the internal evaluations have been encouraging and upbeat. The results presented at the Cyprus business meeting were positive about the project management (95% saying the management is well planned and executed; 95.3% saying the project management is important and useful; 85.7% giving the project management an evaluation of 'excellent' or 'very good'). The evaluations also showed positive views on the implementation of the work plan but there were useful observations about how things could be improved, for example on the development of the ForAge web site, and the coordinating team and work package leaders have tried to amend working practice in light of these suggestions.

The checklist for outputs and deliverables that was discussed at the Cyprus meeting showed good progress and also highlighted some things that needed further attention. The lessons learned from the evaluations have been incorporated into the revisions to the work packages and the procedures and systems. The evaluation of the Cyprus meeting was also positive with strikingly high levels of satisfaction. The evaluation report produced several pages of detailed individual comments about hopes and expectations, the meeting itself, and the information that was imparted. The evaluations of each work package showed that some were regarded as clearly outstanding while some others were in need of further work and improvement. The data on the way ahead raised a number of issues but again were useful and upbeat and positive. The Interim Evaluation Report will be discussed at the third ForAge business meeting in Budapest in October 2013 and any lessons learned will be fed back into the work programme and management of the project.

### **Dissemination, exploitation, sustainability**

Dissemination, exploitation and sustainability are key elements of the ForAge project. The consortium has sought to disseminate information about the project from the very outset. The dissemination plan was discussed in detail at the kick-off meeting in Leicester in February 2012. The project devoted a good deal of time to consideration of target groups, how to reach them, what they might want from ForAge and how the network might provide this for them. The leader of work package 5 on dissemination is Partner 9, PRO-MED from Gdansk

in Poland, and it is energetic and experienced in this field. The dissemination strategy was approved in March 2012 and partners have since been active in putting it into effect.

The consortium is reaching its target groups by using different forms of dissemination:

- Promotion of the website and widespread circulation of the leaflet publicising the aims of the project;
- Targeted publicity of outputs through partners' activities in their own countries;
- Publication and circulation of at least 9 ForAge newsletters;
- Written communications with politicians, interest groups, think tanks, member organisations and groups working in later-life learning;
- Use of the accessible database of policy, research evidence, projects, practice and other relevant data with signposting to other sources;
- Data collection and analysis producing reports and comments and using these data and analyses to stimulate themed discussions on the ForAge Forum;
- Three pan-European conferences;
- Press releases as required to reach other potentially interested groups and individuals;
- Promotion of the work of ForAge in appropriate journals and newsletters such as the monthly Age Platform newsletter *CoverAge* and the *International Journal of Education and Ageing*.

In addition to the project flyer, the web site and database, and more recently the Facebook page, the network's other methods of dissemination are also important and these include the newsletters and other publications, conferences and meetings, and letters and communications. These activities have required a lot of effort by members of the partnership and this is also true of work package 6 which is concerned with exploitation and sustainability. Fortunately, this work package is also led by a member of the consortium who has great experience and expertise in this field – Partner 10 who is from AidLearn in Lisbon, Portugal.

The exploitation plan was discussed at the kick-off meeting in Leicester and again at the business meeting in Cyprus. The network has focused on issues such as mainstreaming and multiplying the results and outputs from the project and on sustainability. The ForAge exploitation plan highlights the need to build closer relationships with target communities and groups and outlines activities and a time plan. The partnership recognises that exploitation is closely related to dissemination but needs to ensure that the project results are not just available and visible – they also need to be used and to bring benefits to the different target groups.

The network realises that exploitation is not easy and it is a longer-term goal that will be a high priority during the second half of the project. It involves increased interaction with potential users of the results of the project which is one reason increased emphasis is being placed on the annual ForAge conferences. The consortium is trying to make sure that the exploitation plan is regularly revised and updated to take account of new information, contacts and developments. Further work on the sustainability of the ForAge network will be a high priority during the second half of the project.

### 3. Project Outcomes and Results

The ForAge network has achieved much in its first 18 months. The work of the project is organised into eight work packages, seven of which run throughout most of the period of the project. WP1 is the management of the partnership; WP2 is information gathering from within the partnership to identify all the partners' collective expertise and contacts; WP3 is analysing the data and building the foundations of the network; WP4 is building and populating the database and web site; WP5 is dissemination; WP6 is exploitation and sustainability; WP7 is evaluation and quality assurance; WP8 is transnational meetings, co-operation and business meetings. Each work package has its own list of deliverables, outputs and targets and these are closely monitored by the coordinators, work package leaders and the rest of the consortium.

#### Major achievements and results

The main targets for the management, administration and coordination of the project, set out in work package 1, have been delivered, including the development of the network structures, the dissemination, exploitation and evaluation plans, and the written and financial reporting forms. Evaluations by partners of this work have been positive. This work package runs throughout the 36 months of the project. Work package 2 has been completed. It was entitled 'Building and maintaining the net – information gathering and sharing'. The main achievements have been the survey of partners, the identification of important issues, concerns, gaps and themes, the collection of data on links with existing networks, projects and programmes and the development of standardised processes for data collection and sharing. Most of these tasks have been finished or are well on the way to completion.

The results from work package 2 relate closely to work package 3 which is entitled 'Making the network – analysing the data'. This work focuses on determining the central issues, policy and research findings, statistics, partnerships, agencies and sectors related to later-life learning. The main achievements have been promoting the programme to relevant groups for the first ForAge conference and analysing the findings of the survey of partners. Good progress has been made with developing the frameworks for, and commencement of, dialogue and communication with national and regional governments and other key agencies and individuals; the framework for, and commencement of, dialogue to determine and share areas of mutual benefit with other networks, partnerships, programmes and projects; and the analysis of data and further survey developments for wider dissemination. Some of this work has taken longer than first envisaged but it was always planned that this work package would run throughout the first 30 months of the project so there is in-built flexibility. The results of this work can be seen on the ForAge database at <http://www.foragenetwork.eu/en/>.

These tasks are important in building the foundations on which to construct the network. The project has made good progress with this work and in identifying issues, ideas, projects, policy, research, initiatives and contacts needed for the network to move forward. Another achievement was the design and agreement on a logo and promotional leaflet. The corporate design was approved at an early stage. The ForAge logo shows the European stars around the letter 'o' and the indication on the letter 'g' that ForAge is concerned with the road ahead. The corporate colours were also agreed and the project flyer was designed and approved. This includes sections on the goals of the network and its background, its aims and outputs, target groups and project dates. The leaflet has been translated into the languages of different countries involved in ForAge. It is available in electronic versions and also as a printed leaflet and has been sent to a large number of groups and individuals in the target groups. It has also been distributed at many conferences and meetings in various European countries and beyond.

The database has been built and is operational with information, ideas, issues and research and a variety of later-life learning materials and links. New material is regularly being added. Building and populating the web pages and database have turned out to be even bigger tasks than originally envisaged and the consortium is devoting greater resources to this central task. The web pages ([www.foragenetwork.eu](http://www.foragenetwork.eu)) include information about ForAge, its activities, news, newsletters, and the forthcoming international conference in Budapest. The ForAge Forum enables online debate and discussion. The ForAge database, which is on the web site, is currently structured around seven categories – policy; research; theory and practice; commentary; newsletters; EU projects; and other resources. It is likely that these categories will expand and change, and there will be developments in terms of improving information retrieval and facilitating analysis of data. The ForAge project has also set up its own Facebook page which assists with communication, dissemination and exploitation: <https://www.facebook.com/pages/Forage-for-later-life-learning-building-on-European-experience/447577198673523?fref=ts>.

Work package 5 is concerned with dissemination and Work package 6 is about exploitation. They have made good progress. The network has already published six different newsletters and these have been circulated to target user communities. The newsletters are available on the web page: <http://www.foragenetwork.eu/en/page/123-forage-network-newsletters/>. The communications with national agencies and government bodies have been postponed from month 15 for practical reasons and the first annual report is now due in month 20. As previously indicated, the web site and database are major achievements and will continue to be developed and populated with further information.

Work on evaluation and quality assurance is well underway. Evaluations of the meetings in Leicester and Cyprus and of the project's progress have been undertaken with positive results. Other major achievements are the organisation of the business meetings and pan-European conferences. The kick-off meeting in Leicester in February 2012 was addressed by representatives from the Department for Business, Innovation and Skills, which is responsible for all adult education in England, ECORYS, the UK national agency, and the European Commission Education and Culture DG. This involvement of the key agencies involved in the field is an example of the way ForAge wishes to make an impact.

The conference and business meeting in Cyprus was held in October 2012. This first ForAge pan-European conference had the theme 'A Society for All Ages' and received positive evaluations from participants. It included presentations from speakers from the European Commission and the Cyprus government, speakers from projects and initiatives, and researchers, academics and experts. There were also discussion groups on some central issues about later-life learning. The two-day ForAge business meeting took place after the conference. The second ForAge pan-European conference, to be held in Budapest at the end of September 2013, has the title 'The Future of Learning for Older People in Europe: Learning from Experience'. It will include a variety of European presenters and speakers from projects and initiatives. It will be followed by the third ForAge business meeting.

### **Initial impact**

The first impact of ForAge was through its promotional leaflet, which was designed, developed, translated and circulated early in the life of the project – mainly via e-mail but also as printed copies which were sent through the post and given to participants at a variety of meetings. Another impact tool is the ForAge newsletter, of which six issues have so far appeared. Individual dissemination activity reports by ForAge partners show that those to whom publicity material has been sent include government ministries and contacts, education departments, and national agents. The ForAge project was also represented at

European Union events celebrating the European Year of Active Ageing and Solidarity between Generations (EY2012). The information circulated about ForAge produced a number of requests from other networks, projects, programmes and partnerships to develop links and collaboration.

The first ForAge conference in Limassol, Cyprus, was successful in drawing in some other European projects. The network is now aiming to build on this experience for the second ForAge European conference which will take place in Budapest from 30 September to 1 October 2013. In addition to the main speakers, by July 2013 seven other EU projects and initiatives had come forward to offer papers and presentations at the conference. This is very encouraging and indicates the need for these events and also that news of the ForAge network is reaching other organisations across Europe and having an impact. Information about the second ForAge pan-European conference is available on the web site at <http://www.foragenetwork.eu/en/database/item/140-forage-2nd-international-conference/>.

The dissemination reports prepared by ForAge partners show the extent of the reach of the network – from local groupings of older people (for example, KAPI in Greece, and U3As in Ireland, Slovakia, Slovenia and Spain) to participation in pan-European, national, regional and local policy making and cross-disciplinary environments (for example, by partners in Austria, Czech Republic, Greece, Ireland, Italy, Netherlands, Slovenia, and UK). This rich variety indicates the great potential for further expansion involving all the partners in ForAge and this will be one of the focal points for the next 18 months and hopefully beyond.

### **Difficulties that the network has experienced**

As with any large transnational project, the ForAge network has experienced some difficulties which have needed management and resolution and in some cases changes to the work plans. Since the launch of the project, some partners have experienced changes in their circumstances and personnel and one partner has been affected by illness to a key member of staff which has meant that there has been a period of reduced activity by that partner. Three partners were obliged to withdraw from the partnership because of changed circumstances and these changes had to be managed by the coordinator and the wider consortium. Given the situation, the Leicester coordinating team assumed leadership and management of two work packages in order to keep activities moving forward as the original leaders could not fulfil their roles – in one case because of staff illness and in the other because the partner organisation's financial position meant they could not continue. These challenges did not mean the project could not achieve its anticipated outputs but they did mean some delays and consequent adjustments to the work programme.

Other challenges that have been experienced relate to chasing progress with tasks, managing and increasing dissemination and enhancing impact, developing closer relations with target groups and communities, and prioritising exploitation and sustainability. As mentioned previously, it is proposed that a small future planning or 'steering' group should meet during the second half of the project to help to push tasks onward, to ensure effective dissemination and impact, and to move exploitation and sustainability forward.

The consortium has made good and effective management and administration high priorities. The coordinating team has analysed the risks and taken action to manage them and has tried to plan for contingencies and uncertainties. The ForAge partnership has adapted well to changed circumstances and partners have shown they are flexible and willing to respond to changes when needed. There are generally high levels of cooperation between partners and a good sense of common purpose. The management of the project is demanding and does take a lot of time and resources, with special efforts needed to make sure that communication is clear and effective, but the experience shows that this has paid dividends for the new and developing ForAge network.

## 4. Partnerships

The ForAge partnership has brought together the expertise and experience of 16 partners from 14 different countries. They have brought complementary skills, expertise and competences. The ForAge consortium has forged a new and developing network and has enabled cooperation between a new team of partners. It is enabling genuine debate between the partners on issues around later-life learning and is promoting the exchange of ideas and information between different European countries.

### **Added value of being a multi-country partnership**

Later-life learning is the principal focus of the work of all 16 partners in this collaboration. Their involvement in this proposal stems from the belief that such a network is needed in order to create an integrated and joined-up approach. The partners are all experienced in European work and have felt the frustration of not having a centralised system to search for examples of work to guide them in their own fields. The network can achieve much more working together than a smaller group or individual organisations could manage.

The partners bring an array of skills and experiences to the project. These include: experience with research communities and academics; intergenerational working; understanding of active and healthy ageing and learning; knowledge of equality issues; the provision of training; organisation of conferences and meetings; work on the empowerment of older people; engagement in teacher training and age awareness; promoting the learning testimonies of older people; collaborating with older people's organisations and groups; liaising with different providers of learning opportunities; connecting with relevant decision makers, politicians, systems and processes; and providing learning opportunities for older people. No single organisation could bring such a wealth of knowledge and experience and so together the partnership is much bigger than the sum of its parts.

The project is strengthened by the European knowledge and experience of individual partners. The partnership draws on knowledge of over 40 past European initiatives and partners are currently involved in others. This cumulation of information about a range of other projects is evidence of the added European value of the ForAge consortium. Further outcomes showing the value of this European partnership include:

- Circulation and increased recognition of European research, policy and practice through the network's links with scientific research and peer-reviewed journals.
- Enrichment of networking and partnership building in later-life learning by promoting achievements, links and contacts through the ForAge newsletters and web site.
- The promotion of information about how to develop later-life learning strategies and programmes in countries/regions/organisations with a nascent interest in this sector.

The ForAge partnership also has a significant geographical reach with partners from 14 different countries stretching from Ireland to Romania and the Netherlands to Italy. This brings the added value of different approaches, histories and traditions and the effects of different cultures, attitudes and beliefs on later-life learning. The network plans to extend this geographical reach through its dissemination and exploitation strategies. Single countries would not be able to address these issues with such effectiveness and transferability. Collaboration is essential for achieving the aims of the ForAge network.

### **Experience of working together in a European partnership**

The individual members of the ForAge network have experience of previous working in European partnerships. The ForAge consortium is a large one and this brings particular

benefits and also challenges. Not all the partners were known to each other but the University of Leicester in the UK, Elephant in the Netherlands and AidLearn in Portugal have between them worked successfully with each of the other partners in the past. The projects in which they were involved were on themes such as: collaborative working; better understanding of national, regional and local contexts; policies and finance; and curriculum development better geared to the individual needs of older people. In addition, all partners have practical experience in innovative learning programmes with older people and first-hand knowledge of the voices, opinions and testimonies of the older learners themselves.

The past experiences of European project working helped ForAge to develop quickly, build trust and confidence and engender common goals. The chosen language for communication within ForAge is English and all the partners are able to communicate with each other using the English language. Material is being translated into partners' own languages as the need arises. The experience of working together in a European partnership has so far been positive. There are generally high levels of co-operation between partners and a good sense of common purpose.

### **Partnerships with groups outside the consortium**

Learning in later-life is a complex field. It encompasses many areas and is undertaken by 'older' people in a range of venues from formal education centres to day care and residential centres. There are potentially a vast number of partners in the field. Older people learn with different generations and among their own cohorts; their 'teachers' may be educationalists, therapists, artists, trainers, care providers and themselves. Funding comes from various sources – for example, public, private, voluntary, health and welfare, education, sports and leisure. This range sometimes creates a duplication of effort, and confusion over terms and targets.

ForAge is aware of several networks that have a thematic focus on later-life learning at a European level. These seek to document best practice in their particular sectors, for example intergenerational learning (EMIL and ENIL). Existing databases such as EVE are invaluable for providing a single access point for information about European projects and their outputs. However, in the context of demographic change and population ageing in Europe, the partners in ForAge believe that further assimilation of initiatives specifically about learning for older people is needed if later-life learning is really to become a means of promoting increased social inclusion for this significant and diverse group.

The ForAge network aims to establish relationships with target user groups. It also seeks to build partnerships with other networks, programmes and agencies and older people themselves, using means such as targeted communications, the newsletters and the web site. One of the intentions behind the annual ForAge European conferences is to draw in other EU activities and consult with and learn from other experts and key networks and organisations. ForAge partners have connections with a range of other partnerships, from local organisations of older learners (for example in Greece, Ireland, Slovakia, Slovenia, and Spain) to pan-European and national policy making groups (for example, in Austria, Czech Republic, Italy, Netherlands, and UK). Such connections bring benefits for ForAge itself as well as for those in the target groups. Building more of these partnerships is a priority for the second half of the project.

## 5. Plans for the Future

The focus of the Forage network is on policy, practice, research and the voices of the older learner. It consciously aims to be sensitive and responsive to all the different contexts, sectors and dimensions. The breadth of experience and expertise within the partnership is a real strength in ensuring that all the separate aspects are covered. The project has reached the half-way stage and is taking stock of what has been achieved and is looking forward to adjusting its plans for the next 18 months to continue to achieve the project objectives. The next business meeting in Budapest in October 2013 will decide on priorities and plans and act as the spring board for the second half of the project.

### Future plans and activities

The proposed small future planning or 'steering' group will meet face-to-face twice in the UK during the last year of the project and also consult by emails and telephone or Skype as necessary. This forward planning group will have the following terms of reference: to build on the dissemination and exploitation plans; to develop ideas for sustainability and the vision for the future; to monitor the strengths, weaknesses, gaps and successes of the ForAge network; to recommend future action and policy and what remains to be done; to build bridges with other projects and initiatives; to plan the third ForAge conference in Portugal; and to plan and assist with the final report.

Work package 3 is of great importance in making the ForAge network. In light of the experience so far, it is planned to follow up communications with other EU initiatives, national agents, government departments and agencies, to develop further online surveys and to create discussions around central issues through the newsletters and website. The plan is to highlight gaps and strengths on a range of later-life learning issues and to pursue new areas of concern, and possibly new initiatives. This will start with partners and will then be rolled out to include key agencies and the website. The issues are likely to include: ethnicity, migration and Roma – access to later-life learning; arts and creativity and later life learning; health and well-being and active ageing and later-life learning; securing the voice of the older learner; later-life learning and employability. The aim will be to summarise existing discussions in different countries and agencies and to disseminate findings on the ForAge website, through newsletters, social media and e-mails.

As in the original plan for work packages 4 and 6, it is intended to continue to populate the ForAge database sections and subsections with appropriate information under its seven current main categories – policy; research; theory and practice; commentary; newsletters; EU projects; other resources. The updated workplan puts greater emphasis on developing the means of information-retrieval, analysing the data for depth, breadth and omissions and on trawling through and analysing a wider selection of data sources. It is also planned to develop and test links to other data sources. The consortium will invest further efforts to continue to raise awareness of the database through e-mails, social media, at events and by other means.

Using their quarterly dissemination reports, the plan is to assess all partners' dissemination activities to ascertain breadth and depth of reach in terms of numbers, countries, sectors, governments, impact and issues. This analysis will feed into and influence the project's future plans and activities including newsletters, discussion groups, communications to key agencies, workshops at events, web links, database, and the network of ForAge clientele. The network will also invest more time in developing its 'Vision for the Future' document and in disseminating this widely and strategically.

The consortium will review and amend the promotional ForAge leaflet to take account of the changes in partners, focus and activities. It is planned to produce the first ForAge report of progress, activities, events, contexts and conclusions with two subsequent reports. The database will be assessed for its content, structure, accessibility, utility, reach, reliability and trustworthiness and this will be discussed by the partnership at its meeting in Budapest in October 2013. The evaluation and quality assurance has proceeded well and the interim evaluation report will also be discussed at the business meeting in Budapest and any necessary action will be taken. It is also planned to undertake external evaluations making use of external assessors from partner countries. This will help to deliver a deeper and richer assessment of the quality of the project and its outputs.

The consortium plans to develop and take forward the work plan set out for work package 8 in the original proposal. It will review the attendance at the conferences held in Cyprus and Budapest, looking at the participants in terms of numbers, breadth of reach, and range of agencies and sectors. It will also use evaluation reports on quality and content to help organise and plan the third conference in Lisbon in October 2014. The forward planning group should be of considerable assistance in planning the Lisbon conference as well as in developing a longer-term vision and strategy to take the ForAge network forward.

### **Vision for the Future**

The overall vision is to make the network sustainable beyond the end of the project funding. The exploitation strategy underlines the aim to work towards sustainability. It outlines the need for the development of a document entitled 'A Vision for the Future' which will set out plans for sustainability. This was discussed at the Cyprus business meeting which considered three options about how the network might continue after the funding period ends: joining an existing association or creating a new one; commercialising the products and establishing a business; approving a consortium agreement defining ownership of intellectual property rights and other products.

The meeting also considered a draft declaration of sustainable support which all partners could sign. In order to take the exploitation and sustainability plans forward, there will be further discussion of the central issues at the business meeting in Budapest in October 2013. All partners have been asked to complete an online questionnaire on 'A Vision for the Future' and the results will form part of the discussion at the business meeting in Budapest.

The ForAge vision for the future is to try to secure the network with the ambitious aim of attracting new partners and members, creating new areas of work, responding to enquiries for information, connecting potential partners to each other and promoting policies and activities that enhance later-life learning in Europe.

## 6. Contribution to EU policies

The changing demographic structure in Europe and the ageing of the population is well known. Europe needs to respond to the challenges and also the opportunities associated with population ageing. Learning for older people offers a cost-effective way to meet those challenges and grasp the opportunities but, as yet, it is not being fully embraced by many if not all governments in the European Union. In this respect, the ForAge network and its activities have an important contribution to make to EU policies, objectives and priorities.

### European objectives and priorities

European policies have highlighted the need for improved adult learning opportunities. In its resolution entitled *It is never too late to learn*, passed on 16 January 2008, the European Parliament urged member states 'to promote the acquisition of knowledge and to develop a culture of lifelong learning'. At its meeting in March 2008, the European Council noted the need to plan for future skills requirements in view of factors such as the ageing population. In May 2008, the European Council's conclusions from its meeting on adult learning were clear on the need for greater investment in lifelong learning. The Council noted that the joint progress report of the Council and Commission on the implementation of the Education and Training work programme had highlighted the low levels of participation in adult learning of older workers. The Council and the representatives of the governments of the member states met in Zaragoza in April 2010 and in their conclusions on *Integration as a Driver for Development and Social Cohesion* they reinforced the view of the value of education: 'education is undoubtedly an essential element in the EU's fight against social exclusion and discrimination'. This must surely apply to adult education. ForAge aims to take this thinking forward and to have an impact on those involved in later-life learning and, most importantly, on older people themselves. The ForAge project is also a contribution in response to policy papers the Commission has published on demography, social inclusion and learning.

### The ForAge contribution

In the last two decades there have been many projects and initiatives on older learners, within different European countries and regions, with many supported by the European Union. Many of these have been highly successful but the best use has not always been made of the lessons from their experiences. This was stressed at the Grundtvig 10<sup>th</sup> Anniversary Conference on 'European Co-operation in Adult Learning – Shaping the Future', held in Copenhagen on 22–24 September 2010. The ForAge network has the aim of contributing to EU policies, objectives and priorities in the field of lifelong learning, older people and the ageing population. It is publicising the achievements of European, national and local projects that focus on learning for older people. It is also responding to European priorities such as intergenerational solidarity and learning, social cohesion, active ageing and overcoming exclusion and providing connections with later-life learning. Among the impact that the ForAge network is having upon the target user communities are increased knowledge and understanding about the key issues facing the ageing European societies, how later-life learning can bring real benefits, and how to get the most out of past projects, and the lessons that should be learned.

The ForAge network is providing a gateway to European initiatives in later-life learning, and is thus helping to promote understanding of learning as a means of engendering social cohesion and inclusion. The ForAge consortium believes that European co-operation on these issues can bring great benefits based on knowledge exchange and mutual learning across national borders. The goal of the network is to promote later-life learning to realise the undoubted benefits across Europe.

## 7. ForAge project partners

Web site: [www.foragenetwork.eu](http://www.foragenetwork.eu)

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IMB Domicilium, Brno, Czech Republic, [www.imbd.wz.cz](http://www.imbd.wz.cz)

50plus Hellas, Athens, Greece [www.50plus.gr](http://www.50plus.gr)

Trebag Ltd, Budapest, Hungary [www.trebag.hu](http://www.trebag.hu)

Age Action Ireland, Dublin, Ireland [www.ageaction.ie](http://www.ageaction.ie)

Lunaria, Rome, Italy [www.lunaria.org](http://www.lunaria.org)

Elephant Learning in Diversity, Netherlands [www.the-elephant.nl](http://www.the-elephant.nl)

PRO-MED Co Ltd, Gdansk, Poland [www.pro-med.org.pl](http://www.pro-med.org.pl)

AidLearn, Lisbon, Portugal [www.aidlearn.com](http://www.aidlearn.com)

Asociatia Euroed, Bucharest, Romania, [www.euro-ed.ro](http://www.euro-ed.ro)

University of the Third Age, Comenius University, Bratislava, Slovakia [www.uniba.sk/utv](http://www.uniba.sk/utv)

Slovenian University of the Third Age, Ljubljana, Slovenia [www.univerza3.si](http://www.univerza3.si)

University of Cordoba, Cordoba, Spain [www.uco.es/intergeneracional](http://www.uco.es/intergeneracional)

Association for Education and Ageing, UK [www.associationforeducationandageing.com](http://www.associationforeducationandageing.com)

University of Leicester, UK [www.le.ac.uk](http://www.le.ac.uk)

