

UBUNTU NETWORK EVALUATION

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SECTION 1 INTRODUCTION

1.1 Background

The Ubuntu Network supports the integration of Development Education (DE) and Education for Sustainable Development (ESD) into Post Primary Initial Teacher Education (ITE) in Ireland.

The Network is made up of teacher educators from University of Limerick (UL), Limerick Institute of Technology (LIT), University College Cork (UCC), National University of Ireland Maynooth (NUIM), National University of Ireland Galway, University College Dublin, Trinity College Dublin, National College of Art and Design, Mary Immaculate College, Mater Dei and St. Angela's College. It is supported by Non-Governmental Organisations (Trócaire, Just Forests, Eco-UNESCO and Amnesty International) and by the DICE Project (Development and Intercultural Education at Primary level).

Ubuntu is currently in the third year of its operation and recently commissioned a review of the Network. *80:20, Educating & Acting for a Better World*, a development education organisation, was selected to undertake this review, which was carried out between April and July 2007. The terms of reference for the review are as follows:

- To evaluate the operation and effectiveness of the Network against its stated aims and objectives¹
- To carry out a review of extant documents and reports related to the overall setting up and operation as well as the impact and effectiveness of the Network.
- To include assessment and evaluation of the following key areas – communication, research support, administrative support, management and networking
- To conduct a series of interviews and focus group review meetings to inform and shape the overall review
- To draft a concise report to shape plans for year three, as well as the overall future effectiveness of the network
- To conduct this review and evaluation within the agreed timeframe and budget.

1.2 Methodology

An initial meeting was held between 80:20 and the Ubuntu Steering Committee to establish the aims of the Steering Committee in relation to the review. Based on this meeting and the documentation provided by the Steering Committee, a set of key questions was agreed to inform the compilation of a structured questionnaire and an informal focus group and interview schedule. The questionnaire was predominantly quantitative in nature with a small number of open questions to gain a more in-depth understanding of some of the responses, while the focus groups and interviews were used to explore the findings from the questionnaire and the more qualitative aspects of the Network in greater detail.

¹ The objectives of the Network are stated on the Ubuntu website at www.ubuntu.ie

1.3 Review Summary

The following conclusions and recommendations summarise the main body of the report that follows:

Key Findings:

- The Ubuntu Network is significantly valued and respected by those who have participated to date and is seen to be responding effectively to real needs on the ground. The Network has contributed to the personal and professional development needs of its members.

The 'added value' character of the Network can be clearly identified and outlined by its members – funding, stimulation, networking opportunities, effective communication, practical ideas, 'external validation', a sense of broader engagement and a strong focus on research as well as 'tools' to carry out such research.

- The Network is seen as having a clear focus at two levels – one, on teacher education and teacher educators and, secondly, on the links between development education and education for sustainable development.
- The Network is seen to be an effective 'facilitating' mechanism rather than an 'initiating' mechanism.
- The Network is seen to be very strong and effective on administration but is seen, by some, to be weaker in relation to its role of capacity-building among members.
- The research agenda of the Network is seen as fundamental and especially productive even if its full potential cannot yet be realised due to the relative infancy of the Network.
- The Network faces five key tensions or challenges as follows:
 - Emphasis of the Network vis à vis Development Education and Education for Sustainable Development
 - The need for institutional commitment to the Network as opposed to individual commitment
 - Consolidation of the work to date and staying within the agreed focus versus expansion of the remit/activities of the Network
 - The remit of the Network within the (multi-partner) Regional Centre of Excellence in relation to Education for Sustainable Development versus the remit of the Network in relation to Development Education
 - The need to diversify the funding base of the Network versus the need to keep it tightly focused.

Recommendations:

- It is recommended that the Network make additional specific provision for further developing its own capacity-building role among Network members e.g. through additional training for Ubuntu staff.
- It is recommended that the Network review the 'balance' of time allocated at Steering Committee for substantive agenda items and administrative requirements.
- It is recommended that the Network create additional opportunities for a broader discussion between Ubuntu and others involved in the DE and ESD sectors.

- It is recommended that specific time be allocated to discussing, in detail, the research agenda of the Network in all its dimensions including funding.
- It is recommended that a series of meetings be initiated with current and potential funders, to introduce the Network and its agenda, to identify and discuss areas of potential mutual interest and to put forward specific proposals for consideration.
- It is recommended that the Steering Committee further address the nature and scale of the relationship between the Network and the Regional Centre of Excellence in ESD in order to ensure transparency and mutual 'buy-in'.
- In its next phase of development, it is recommended that the Network consider developing broad Memoranda of Understanding with core institutional members in order to ensure some formal grounds for the relationships between the Network and its institutional members.
- It is recommended that Ubuntu focus strongly on consolidating the work initiated to date and not on expanding its agenda beyond the core objectives as originally agreed.

SECTION 2 FINDINGS

A total of sixteen questionnaires was returned, representing 21 individuals and 10 institutions or organisations. Of the 21 individuals, 10 are members of the Ubuntu Steering Committee. Six respondents are members of the Network for more than two years while 7 are members for approximately one year. Three have been members for less than one year.

Responses to questions posed through the questionnaire are shown in the tables below. The questionnaire analysis provides a somewhat crude but nonetheless useful measure of members' opinions about the operation of the network. Given the relatively small number of respondents, whole numbers are used in the tables instead of percentages for the sake of clarity and meaningfulness. In some cases the total number of responses does not equal 16; this is because some respondents did not answer the particular question. When reading the tables, it is important to remember that some (2) questionnaires were completed on a group basis, representing 7 individuals, within 2 organisations. The remaining 14 questionnaires were completed by individuals and this may influence the findings to some degree.

2.1 The Steering Committee

Three-quarters of respondents including all of those who are members of the Steering Committee (SC) believe that the relevant institutions are represented on the SC. A majority of respondents also believes that the frequency and location of SC meetings is satisfactory as well as the operation of the rotating chair. In addition, the use of sub-committees on specific tasks is considered to be effective. However, opinion is divided on the use of conference-calling in place of face-to-face meetings and there is a variance among respondents on the issue of video-conferencing for future Steering Committee meetings.

This finding is clarified in interviews and focus groups wherein participants stated that they are happy to consider alternative Information Communication Technologies (ICTs) such as conference-calling and online forums for focused discussions on specific topics but that these alternatives should not take the place of face-to-face meetings. Given that Ubuntu is essentially a Network, most members feel that networking i.e. meeting people is one of the core functions. Nonetheless, a compromise of perhaps four face-to-face meetings per year supplemented with the use of ICTs for specific issues appears to appeal to the majority of participants in interviews and focus groups.

Reservations were expressed around the use of online forums except for very specific and focused discussions around a particular topic, within a set timeframe. This is based on the experience of participants who find that there is less commitment to online forums than to other forms of communication.

Table 2.1 Steering Committee

In relation to the Steering Committee (SC):	Yes	No	Unsure	N/A
Relevant institutions/organisations are adequately represented on the SC	12	0	2	2
The frequency of SC meetings is satisfactory	11	1	2	2
The location of SC meetings is satisfactory	11	2	1	2
The rotating SC Chair operates effectively	10	1	3	2
The use of sub-committees on specific tasks is effective	11	1	2	2
The use of conference-calling in place of face-to-face meetings is effective	7	1	6	2
The Network should consider the use of Video-Conferencing for SC meetings	7	2	5	2

Members also suggested that they would like to have more discussion of the content of the research projects at meetings rather than primarily discussing administrative issues. It may therefore be the case that while ICTs could suffice for dealing with administrative issues, face-to-face meetings could be used as a forum for discussing content, combined with ICTs between meetings.

Finally, while it is understood that all members of the Steering Committee will not be in a position to attend all meetings, a proposal to set dates for face-to-face meetings at the beginning of the year may encourage greater participation, particularly if members submit in advance, dates on which they are unavailable.

2.2 Communication

In general, communication from the Network to members is considered to be highly effective. However, links with the informal education sector, such as the media and with the non-formal education sector e.g. Non- Governmental Organisations (NGOs) are considered to be slightly weaker as is member-to- member communication and awareness of Development Education at a *departmental* level.

As noted above, members would like to see more information being communicated on the core work of the Network i.e. the research projects and it is suggested that this should be done at face-to-face meetings in order to encourage greater networking around the research topics.

Table 2.2 Communication

In relation to Communication:	Yes	No	Unsure	N/A
Outcomes/minutes of Ubuntu meetings are distributed effectively	13	0	3	0
Information on the Ubuntu Network can be readily accessed	14	0	2	0
Information on activities within the Network is readily available	15	0	1	0
The Network has increased awareness of DE within my department/organisation	11	1	3	1
The Network has generated interest in DE within my department/organisation	13	1	1	1
The Network has enabled me to develop links with teacher-educators	14	0	2	0
The Network has enabled me to develop links with informal education sectors ¹	7	8	1	0
The Network has enabled me to develop links with non-formal education sectors ²	10	2	2	2
Member to member communication takes place in relation to DE/ESD matters	11	3	2	0
Forms of communication are satisfactory – email, phone calls, face-to-face	14	0	1	0

¹ Informal education sectors such as media. ² Non-formal education sectors such as NGOs

One of the issues, which frequently arose in focus group and interview discussions was the subject of 'departmental buy-in'. While the majority of questionnaire respondents agree that Ubuntu has increased awareness of and generated interest in DE within their department or organisation, most interviewees commented that it is difficult in some institutions to obtain departmental buy-in. In other words, that membership of the Network becomes institutionalised rather than being dependent on interested individuals. This lack of departmental buy-in leads to concerns about the sustainability of the Network because if those key individuals move, membership of the Network may be affected. This is viewed by participants as being directly related to the level of communication about the work of Ubuntu at a departmental or institutional level.

This issue is also related to the perception among colleagues of Ubuntu members that Development Education is to a certain extent, subject-specific. While many view Development Education as being inherently related to subjects such as geography or social studies for example,

there is a persistent perception that other subjects such as Physical Education or Woodwork, simply do not lend themselves to a DE slant. Interview and focus group participants therefore believe that it is imperative for Ubuntu to find creative ways of communicating its message to a wider audience of teacher educators. This must, however, be done carefully in order to ensure that it does not appear 'forced' or 'contrived', which would then become counter-productive and result in DE activities without actually embedding the substance of the core issues. In addition, some suggested the need to develop a language to communicate this message outside of the teacher education arena – within the NGO sector and among government representatives for example.

While Ubuntu staff are in a position to visit member institutions (and non-member institutions), offering presentations to staff and students for the purpose of increasing awareness of DE/ESD, the issue of communication to a diverse audience was raised by a number of review participants. It can be extremely difficult to pitch a presentation at an audience, which includes some who are very familiar with the topic and indeed some who are already working at a high level in this regard, but also includes those who are entirely unfamiliar with the subject area or terminology. It was therefore suggested that some capacity-building or training be provided for Ubuntu staff members to increase their own potential for capacity-building both among Network member institutions and outside organisations.

2.3 Research Activities to date

On average, three-quarters of respondents agree that in relation to action research in Development Education and Education for Sustainable Development, Ubuntu has prompted and supported them to engage in such research as well as supporting the setup, design and implementation of these research activities. However, only four respondents are able to state that the Network supported the process of data entry arising from this research while only two received support in relation to data analysis. Of greater concern, is the fact that in each of these cases, three respondents state that they are 'unsure' whether or not the Network supported data input and analysis, indicating perhaps that there is a lack of awareness within institutions about the work being supported by Ubuntu.

Interviews and focus groups confirmed that a significant proportion of members, including those on the Steering Committee, were previously unaware of the research support being offered by Ubuntu, particularly in terms of data entry and analysis.

Funding was the single greatest issue mentioned in relation to research activities. Although funding is relatively small, it nonetheless provides a 'stimulus' to encourage research activities, which might otherwise remain as 'discussions over coffee'. One respondent comments that it 'motivates students to turn up at meetings'. It also engenders a certain accountability in that there is a given timeframe during which, research must be completed.

Table 2.3 Research Activities to date

(iii) Research Activities to date

In relation to supporting DE/ESD research activities IN MY INSTITUTION:	Yes	No	Unsure	N/A
The Network supported my engagement in action-research in DE/ESD	12	0	0	3
The Network supported the setup/design of DE/ESD research activities	12	1	0	2
The Network supported the implementation of DE/ESD research	11	1	0	3
The Network supported the process of data entry from ED/ESD research	4	4	3	4
The Network supported the process of data analysis from DE/ESD research	2	6	3	4
The Network has prompted me to engage in action-research in DE/ESD	12	1	1	2

2.4 Increasing Capacity

Again, a majority of respondents are in agreement that the Network has facilitated them in developing DE/ESD capacity through interaction and discussion with Network members; collaboration on projects with other members, workshops and seminars and the provision of information and papers. The strongest agreement in this regard was in relation to interaction and discussion with Network members, although the institution disagreeing with this statement represents five individuals. All of those disagreeing with the statement that collaboration on projects with other members has facilitated them in developing DE/ESD capacity, are members of the Steering Committee. Just over half of respondents said that the Network had helped them to increase DE/ESD capacity through action-research, although this question was not applicable to two respondents.

Table 2.4 Increasing Capacity

The Network facilitates me in developing DE/ESD capacity through:	Yes	No	Unsure	N/A
Interaction/discussion with Network members	15	1	0	0
Collaboration on projects with other members	12	3	1	0
Action-research: design, implementation, reporting etc.	9	4	1	2
DE/ESD workshops and seminars	12	3	1	0
Provision of information, papers etc.	12	3	1	0

Interview and focus group participants agree that the interaction with other members, which the Ubuntu Network has afforded them, has been highly valuable in developing DE/ESD capacity. However, they would like to see this interaction developing to the next stage, which is a greater level of collaboration on projects with other members.

In addition, while review participants agree that Ubuntu has been very successful in bringing together teacher educators around the subject of DE/ESD and providing a forum for engagement and collaboration, they note that it has not initiated this work and that some institutions have been expressing an interest in this area for a number of years.

2.5 Benefits

The greatest perceived benefit of the network is the networking opportunities, which it affords. The Network provides a common focus and prevents a 'sense of isolation'. In addition, 14 respondents feel that the Network has benefited them through information provided by the Ubuntu website and contacts made with formal and informal educators. Presumably this refers mainly to contacts in the formal education sector given the findings under the heading 'communication' where only 7 respondents indicated that the Network has helped them to develop links with the informal education sector. Information on DE/ESD in other institutions and financial support for DE/ESD projects are perceived as benefits by three-quarters of respondents. However links with the Steering Committee and support for devising and implementing research projects score slightly lower. Again, data entry and analysis do not rate highly as benefits although based on the findings from interviews and focus groups, this may be due to a lack of awareness of this service among members.

One of the key benefits identified in particular by project participants is the impetus the Network provides to 'formalise' research ideas. They believe that there is much latent intellectual interest and curiosity in relation to DE/ESD issues, which the Network has helped to bring to the surface. Some of the comments made by review participants in relation to the benefits of Ubuntu membership include: 'It has raised my levels of awareness of several issues, provided valuable

resources and brought a sense of collective purpose to bear on DE and ESD'; 'I find I am more engaged, involved, aware and enthusiastic'; 'Beyond the Ubuntu mandate, developing a working relationship with other Teacher Education institutions is very rewarding'; 'To observe the students making a difference while on teaching practice and in their own lives'; 'The personal satisfaction received out of completing such a worthwhile project'.

Table 2.5 Benefits

To date, I have found the following aspects of the Network useful	Yes	No	Unsure	N/A
Networking opportunities – formal & informal	15	0	1	0
Links with the Steering Committee	10	2	3	1
Support for devising and implementing research projects	9	2	2	3
Support for data entry	4	5	2	5
Support for data analysis	0	7	2	6
Financial support for DE/ESD projects	12	0	1	3
Information provided by the Ubuntu website	14	1	0	1
Contacts made with formal and informal educators	14	1	0	0
Information on DE/ESD in other institutions	13	1	2	0

One of the perceived benefits for Irish Aid is the access, which the Ubuntu Network provides to post-primary teacher educators, a key multiplier group in the mainstreaming of a DE perspective within the formal education sector. This multiplier effect is however, somewhat difficult to quantify and members are keen to stress that there should be no attempt to measure the impact of Ubuntu with regard to raising the profile of DE/ESD issues among post-primary teachers until the Network has been in existence for at least four years. This is primarily because the curriculum for student teachers is already so tightly packed that they tend to focus predominantly on those aspects, which will be assessed. In addition, newly qualified teachers often have a core set of priorities and it is only after a number of years, when they become comfortable with their teaching practice in this regard, that they then begin to recall other relatively more peripheral aspects of their teacher education such as DE and examine opportunities for integrating this into their teaching practice.

In addition, there are significant difficulties inherent in measuring the impact of the Network on teaching practice and ultimately on students. In the first instance, the impact of DE in teacher education on student teachers would have to be measured; secondly, the impact on students and finally, the question of how much of this impact is attributable to Ubuntu would have to be addressed.

A number of review participants argue that in any case, meaningful impacts are actually at the staff level. The objective of Ubuntu is to provide a forum for teacher educators and that to begin measuring the impact of the Network on post-primary teachers and students at this stage, constitutes a form of 'mission-drift'.

Furthermore, the question of impact would, according to respondents need to be more clearly defined i.e. what does it mean to measure impact? For instance would it be the impact on knowledge, on attitudes, on skills? Even if there was clarity in relation to the impact to be measured, the Network is a fairly loose affiliation of staff, some of whom have focused projects in their own institutions. In this respect, talking about a general impact of the Network may be less helpful than focusing on the impact of a particular project. Consequently, it is necessary to be aware of the limitations of drawing facile conclusions about an overall impact without much evidence to support such conclusions.

However, there is an acknowledgement that the action-research projects may, in time, yield significant results in relation to student teachers and that the end result will be a 'trickle-down' effect on students. In the meantime, Irish Aid suggests that figures could be provided by Ubuntu through its member organisations on the number of student teachers currently with access to a Development Education component or module in their programme. Such statistical analysis is not however, within the remit of the Network's stated objectives and this is acknowledged by Irish Aid.

2.6 Operation of the Network

Overall, the administration of the network is perceived among members to be 'excellent', while management of the Network also scores highly. As expected however, based on the findings above, research support is not rated highly by members. Interestingly, there is mixed opinion in relation to networking opportunities, with just under half rating this aspect of the Network as 'good' rather than 'excellent'. Given that networking is considered to be a key function of the Ubuntu Network, this finding is somewhat surprising and may relate to the perceived lack of opportunities for face-to-face meetings during which, the core work of the network i.e. the research projects are discussed.

Table 2.6 Operation of the Network

	Excellent	Good	Poor	Unsure
Administration	15	1	0	0
Research support	4	8	4	0
Management	13	3	0	0
Networking opportunities	9	7	0	0

2.6 Future operation of the Network

Respondents are generally happy with the level of communication from the Network Office about operational matters, the level of information via emails and newsletters and website updates. However, they would like to see more position papers written by the network, more emphasis on writing journal papers and conference papers, more financial support of action-research projects and more communication from the Network Office about DE/ESD research activities. Capacity-building sessions and links with other national networks and associations would also be welcomed.

One issue of concern in relation to the administration of the Network is the physical space available for Ubuntu staff. The size of the office currently occupied by the two Ubuntu staff members is a cause for health and safety concerns and is a practical consideration, which needs to be addressed.

The issue of funding allocations was raised by some members who question what they view as the relatively large proportion of money that is spent on 'administration' of the Network compared with the amount that goes to 'educational' activities. They express the concern that spending should reflect the aims of the project. This perspective raises two important points. In the first instance, there appears to be a lack of awareness among Network members of the role of Ubuntu staff. The majority of work undertaken by the two Ubuntu staff members is educational in focus whereas many members of the Network believe that their role is predominantly administrative. This finding may indicate the need for greater communication about the role of Ubuntu staff, particularly in relation to research support.

Secondly, review participants overwhelmingly agree that the management and administration of the Network is 'excellent' and they acknowledge that the smooth running of the Network is facilitated by such first-rate administration. In addition, they do not want to see too great a reduction in face-to-face meetings and opportunities for networking. The desire to maintain this level of administration is therefore somewhat at odds with the desire to reduce the proportion of funding allocated to administration of the network. This challenge might best be addressed in a discussion at Steering Committee level about the level of available resources on the one hand and a clarification on the other of what constitutes strictly 'administrative' activities and what constitutes 'educational' activities.

Table 2.6 Future operation of the Network

In relation to the operation of the Network, I would like to see:	More	Less	Same	N/A
Communication from Network Office about operational matters ¹	3	0	13	0
Communication from Network Office about DE/ESD research activities ²	10	0	6	0
Communication from Network Office about DE/ESD events within the Network ³	5	0	11	0
Communication between members of the Network about DE/ESD	6	0	10	0
Information via emails	3	0	13	0
Information via newsletters	2	1	13	0
Face-to-face meetings (of sub-committees and with co-ordinator/research assoc.)	5	0	11	0
Capacity-building sessions such as lectures, workshops and exhibition days	9	0	4	2
Website updates	2	0	14	0
Emphasis on writing conference papers	10	0	4	1
Emphasis on writing journal papers	11	0	3	1
Position papers written by the Network e.g. to influence policy	12	0	3	1
Links with other national networks and associations	8	0	8	0
Financial support of action-research projects	11	0	4	1
Distribution of information on DE/ESD ongoing in other institutions/organisations	7	0	8	0
Organised visits to other institutions/organisations	7	2	4	1

¹ Operational matters such as visits, meetings, finances, minutes, reports. ² Research matters within the Network such as research methods & outcomes. ³ DE/ESD events such as workshops and seminars

Review participants would like to see the network become a focus for policy discussion and influence. Some believe that there is too great an emphasis on 'independent republics' (subjects) in macro curriculum policy and that this should be challenged by Ubuntu so that individual teacher education departments begin to collaborate with a view to impacting on policy. Some level of capacity-building might then be desirable in relation to writing reports for diverse audiences e.g. politicians or civil servants in order to translate the message coming from Ubuntu into policy submissions.

A number of participants suggest that the Network should move into the area of continuing professional development to become a support for all teachers at second level while others would like to examine the feasibility of developing a journal in Development Education, thus supporting third and fourth level. In relation to this, there is a proposal for support for graduates to continue to integrate DE into their teaching in order to ensure its sustainability. Such support might take the form of participation in one-day conferences/workshops where the work of Ubuntu would be showcased.

In relation to the research projects, longitudinal studies are desirable according to review participants who suggest that those projects which demonstrate best practice should be supported. There is a strong sense among members that the Network should remain research-based because currently, not enough is known about how to integrate Development Education into Initial Teacher Education.

There are mixed opinions about the joint application to the UNESCO Regional Centre of Expertise (RCE). Some respondents express concern that this will draw attention away from the 'Development' component towards the 'Environment' component implicit in 'Sustainability'. Others believe that RCE status can only raise the profile of the Network and thereby raise the status of Development Education within teacher education and among a wider audience. In addition, many members express the view that there is a natural link between DE and ESD and that this link is, in fact, 'reinvigorating' for DE. It is therefore apparent that the relationship between the RCE and Ubuntu needs to be clarified so that each can enrich the other and therefore be effective in achieving their respective objectives.

Finally and perhaps most importantly, review participants note the need for security of funding in the form of a funding strategy that puts permanency to the fore. In order to secure and sustain the impact of Ubuntu, it requires a longer-term funding commitment. To achieve this, according to some members, the funding base should be broadened and linkages should be created with other EU countries, which might potentially also involve collaborative research. However, others point out that the research funding provided by Ubuntu is intended as seed money and that other funding opportunities are already available for research projects including the *Irish Aid Development Education Grants Scheme*. In addition, involvement in the European RCE Network will bring a set of EU partners and potential access to EU-funding so that diversification in this regard is already being pursued.

2.7 Functions in Year 3

In year 3, respondents would like to see the Network engage in Ubuntu events both for exhibiting and exploring DE/ESD in Initial Teacher Education and for networking with NGOs and other DE/ESD practitioners. They would also like to see further promotion of DE/ESD in post-primary teacher education and support in planning for applications for additional funding. Other functions, which are high on the priority list of respondents include Ubuntu publications on DE/ESD, Ubuntu events for networking with other teacher educators and documentation of 'good practice / best practice' in DE/ESD. Of note is the fact that online discussions on DE/ESD in teacher education do not rate highly among respondents indicating that a move to other technologies for the functioning of the Network may, at this stage, be somewhat premature.

The only additional suggestion for year 3 specifically was a request for more information about the progress of the research projects and exchange of ideas at the Steering Committee meetings. Other than this, review participants overwhelmingly stress that the current programme for Ubuntu is sufficient and that if these objectives are achieved, this will mean the Network has been hugely successful. Almost all respondents therefore caution against taking on any new objectives and suggest instead that Network members focus on deepening the current content rather than broadening its focus. Some comment on the lack of time they would have for taking on additional work and are concerned that a greater workload would inhibit their ability to fully participate thereby undermining the overall functionality of the Network.

Table 2.7 Functions in Year 3

I would like to see the Network engage in:	Yes	No	Maybe	N/A
Capacity-building sessions (with accreditation/recognition for participation)	11	2	3	0
Outline of all DE/ESD work in education departments of member institutions	12	0	4	0
Outline of all DE/ESD work in non-education-specific member organisations	9	0	7	0
Collaborative DE/ESD action-research projects	12	0	4	0
Ubuntu publications (journal articles etc.) on DE/ESD	13	1	2	0
Ubuntu events that exhibit and explore DE/ESD in Initial Teacher Education	14	0	2	0
Ubuntu events for networking with other teacher educators	13	0	3	0
Ubuntu events for networking with NGOs and other DE/ESD practitioners	14	0	2	0
Online discussions on DE/ESD in teacher education	4	3	9	0
Linking with outside DE/ESD organisations or initiatives	9	0	7	0
Measures to influence education policy	12	0	4	0
Further promotion of DE/ESD in post-primary teacher education	14	0	2	0
Creation of publications on DE/ESD in Initial Teacher Education	12	1	3	0
Documentation of 'good practice'/'best practice' in DE/ESD	13	1	2	0
Support in planning for applications for additional funding	14	1	1	0
Engagement of other members of your department/institution in DE/ESD	10	0	5	1

SECTION 3 CONCLUSIONS

- **The Ubuntu Network is significantly valued and respected by those who have participated to date** – participants in the review value the Network for very specific reasons which they can clearly articulate, both personally and in relation to their institutions (even where the institutional engagement is limited). The Network can therefore be said to be fulfilling a real need and to be responding to current needs and opportunities.

Those consulted value the Network for what it has contributed to them in terms of ‘personal satisfaction’, for what it has added to ‘student enjoyment of learning’, for the value of ‘external input’ and for generating a sense of ‘collective purpose’. One commentator summarised the views of many others when referring to the value of the Network as ‘providing the opportunity to participate in development-oriented conversations’.

- **The Network is seen to be contributing specific ‘added value’ – limited seed funding, networking opportunities, effective communication platforms, research agendas and practical ideas** – those consulted were clear about the value of the Network and some of the key phrases used illustrate this. The Network was described as ‘a buttress or scaffold’, ‘a support or stimulus’, ‘a yeast’, ‘a facilitator’ and ‘an effective way to involve others’. Despite its small scale, the funding provided is described by many as ‘motivating’ or ‘encouraging’ as well as adding a measure of ‘accountability’ (in terms of encouraging members to contribute to the larger research agenda).

The contribution of the Network to communication between teacher educators is highly praised and clearly valued. A particular contribution identified by Network participants was the focus on action research projects – many were/are already involved in these, but the Network has contributed a sense of being involved in a much larger, research-driven agenda. Many also commented on the value of the Network in adding ‘practical ideas, experiences, resources and methodologies’ to work already underway.

The Network is seen to provide a degree of ‘external validation’ to work in DE and ESD, something which cannot be underestimated at individual college level. The Network is also seen to add to the national profile of both DE and ESD.

In addition, the Network is seen to perform a role in challenging what one commentator called the ‘ritualisation’ of DE/ESD – many of those consulted feel that the Network encourages and stimulates individuals to go beyond traditional approaches and mindsets and to undertake new activities and methodologies.

- **The Network is seen as having a clear focus at two levels – one, on teacher education and teacher educators and, secondly, on the links between development education and education for sustainable development** – many commented that the key strength of the Network is its clear focus on teacher education, this makes it effective and focused unlike other networks with too broad an agenda. The link between DE and ESD was described as ‘invigorating’ and necessary. However, both of these points are also the subject of concerns regarding the future of the Network.
- **The Network was largely seen as a ‘facilitating’ mechanism rather than an ‘initiating’ mechanism** – many commented that the agendas addressed by the Network were already underway, to varying degrees, in the different member colleges. In this sense the Network did not ‘begin’ the agenda, it ‘added value’ to it, linked people together more effectively and provided a platform for moving ahead, together. The Network also added ‘credibility’ to arguments around the value of DE and/or ESD in individual colleges where key personnel and structures still need to be ‘won over’.

- **The Network is seen to have very strong and effective administration but is seen to be weak on ‘capacity-building capacity’** – those consulted were, without exception, very positive about the administrative dimensions of the Network – communications, information flow, efficiency of meetings, minutes etc. The one area to which participants referred in terms of relative weakness was that of ‘capacity-building capacity’. There is a general feeling that the level and quality of input and support from the Network needs to improve if it is to have the desired impact at college staff level.
- **The research agenda of the Network is seen as fundamental** – throughout this review, the greatest focus of participants was on research – the value of it, the need for much more of it, the need to share outcomes and generalise lessons, the need for research on impact (and indicators) for measuring it etc. Particular reference was made to the need for investment in longitudinal studies.
- **The Network is perceived by many to face five key tensions or challenges identified in the course of this review:**
 - **that between DE and ESD** – there is clear debate among members of the Network as to the degree of emphasis on ‘development’ and/or ‘environment’. For some (including the funding organisation), development might be in danger of losing out to ‘environment’ while, for others, this is a non-issue as the two agendas are ‘one’ or are well integrated together in the Network. However, the tension continues to exist and needs to be addressed.
 - **that between individual commitment to the Network and its agenda and institutional commitment** – it is clear, and inevitable and necessary, that individuals remain key to the presence and functioning of the Network at institutional level. However, an over-dependence on key individuals is unsustainable in the long-term and leaves the Network vulnerable to staff movements. If Ubuntu is to develop and consolidate, the Network needs to find new ways to ‘institutionalise’ commitment without losing impetus and energy.
 - **that between consolidating the work to date and staying within the agreed focus and expanding the remit/activities of the Network** – there is a strong feeling amongst members that the focus on teacher education and teacher educators, rather than the whole college or student communities, should remain and that pressure or expectations to move beyond the current remit should be resisted. In other words, many believe that the current agenda needs to be consolidated and ‘deepened’ rather than widening the agenda to incorporate new objectives. However, within the Network there is a minority that would like to see the agenda expanded to include new objectives.

On a related theme, some commentators make the case for a ‘core strand’ of work to focus on a very basic question – why bother with this agenda at all, what is the relevance to me? This need arises from the perceived attitudes of many students and some academics regarding the subject-specificity of Development Education and Education for Sustainable Development and makes progress on specific development or environment issues more difficult. There is a need therefore to focus directly on this issue.

- **that between the Regional Centre of Excellence (agreed for Limerick) and the Network itself** – a specific concern that arose during the review revolves around the recognition of a Regional Centre of Excellence in ESD in Limerick and the

degree to which this may impinge on the 'development' aspect as well as the institutional structures of the Network.

- **that between the need to diversify the funding base of the Network and the need to keep it tightly focused** – many participants recognise the difficulties associated with being dependent on one funding source. In order to ensure the viability of the Network (and its independence), other sources of support need to be found. This may lead to a tension around the expectations and agendas of such funding sources as well as those of teacher education *per se* and those of the member colleges.

SECTION 4 RECOMMENDATIONS

- **Developing the Network's own capacity in DE and ESD** – it is recommended that specific provision be made for developing further the capacity of Ubuntu staff to engage with DE and ESD issues. This could take the form of access to existing courses in Ireland or abroad, to, for example, summer schools, short courses and distance education opportunities. It might also take the form of direct support from Steering Committee members in Ubuntu activities in particular colleges. Achieving a 'balance' between working at the 'higher levels' of DE and ESD and providing stimulus and support to those engaging for the first time is a difficult task but this review clearly suggests the need for deeper engagement with the substantive issues of both DE and ESD.
- **Making provision for discussion and debate on the substantive agenda of the Network** – following this review, it is strongly recommended that the Network make specific provision at its Steering Committee meetings, or at separately convened meetings, to discuss the more substantive elements of the Network agenda. There is a sense that the meetings are overly dominated by administrative matters and that the 'balance' may need to be redesigned. It is also recommended that 'time out', in the form of specially convened meetings/workshops, be organised to reflect on the substantive issues facing the Network, especially those of research, funding and consolidation/expansion.

A related recommendation concerns the need to create opportunities for a broader discussion between Ubuntu and others involved in the DE and ESD sectors. It is recommended that a workshop be convened for this purpose with a number of objectives in mind:

- to inform others of the work and value of the Network
 - to identify areas of common interest and possible collaboration
 - to seek synergies and linkages between agendas etc.
- **On Research** – research is seen to be at the centre of Ubuntu's agenda and is highly valued by members. Specific time needs to be allocated to discuss this agenda in more detail and to ensure what support is available to members, what research should be given priority and how the lessons from the individual components of research can be 'scaled-up'.

Additionally, the seed funding provided for research is highly valued and, once the case for its broader value to the Network is proven through workshops and publications, enhanced funding capacity should be sought for research. Sources for such funding could include existing Third Level research funding mechanisms, Irish Aid, the Department of the Environment as well as, to a much more limited extent, NGOs.

- **On Funding** – it is recommended that a series of meetings be initiated with current and potential funders, to introduce the Network and its agenda (in broader detail than may currently be the case), to identify and discuss areas of potential mutual interest and to put forward specific proposals for consideration. A basic introductory resource on the Network, its agenda and delivery to date, will be necessary for such meetings.
- **On links to the Regional Centre of Excellence** – it is recommended that the Steering Committee address directly the nature and scale of the relationship between the Network and the Centre in order to ensure transparency and mutual 'buy-in'. A formal 'minuting' of the potential relationship would help to assuage any concerns or misgivings members may currently have regarding this issue.

- **On institutional 'buy-in'** – in its next phase of development, the Network should seriously consider developing broad Memoranda of Understanding with the core institutional members in order to ensure some formal grounds for the relationships between the Network and its institutional members. Such MOUs need not be overly formal but should outline the basic nature of institutional commitment and responsibility as regards the Network and vice versa.
- **On developing future agendas** – the majority of those consulted in this review were of the opinion that the Network should focus strongly on consolidating the work initiated to date and not overly expand its agenda beyond the core focus originally agreed. It is therefore recommended that the Network place priority on consolidating the core work prior to considering any other initiatives that might distract current time and capacity. The Network clearly needs to grow and expand but at present, the view of the majority of members consulted is that it should stay focused on the core mission agreed to date.