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**MATURE self-study training programme**

**Introduction**

If your interest is sparked by: older people; ageing; later-life learning; inclusion; disadvantage; overcoming barriers – read on.

If you teach adults; train teachers of adults; have older people in your classes or groups; run events that attract older people; work with seniors in public services, voluntary and community groups or private companies – read on.

MATURE training could be just what you are looking for!

**The MATURE project**

MATURE – Making Adult Teaching Useful, Relevant and Engaging - <http://matureproject.eu/>

Funded through the European Union Lifelong Learning Programme (Grundtvig), MATURE was a multi-lateral project with partners from: Austria, Germany, Greece, Poland, Portugal, Slovenia, Switzerland and the UK. The project’s purpose was to develop and test units of continuing professional development for practitioners in formal and non-formal adult education.

The MATURE team’s focus for the project was the promotion of skills and strategies to enable people to recognise and deal with age-related barriers to learning such as those caused by health, dependency, cultural and/or attitudinal factors. This commitment arose from work and experience in later-life learning and in other actions related to the well-being of seniors undertaken by all partners at national level and in collaboration across Europe and beyond.

**MATURE training**

The premise for MATURE training is that learning has a significant part to play in underpinning a range of actions that support well-being and autonomy in later life. MATURE training challenges people to acknowledge and react to this fact in particular seeking to understand and overcome barriers to participation.

**Why is MATURE training a good idea?**

There is increasing emphasis in European rhetoric on ‘participation’ as a key contributor to the health of societies and individuals.

 ‘Enabling older people to live full and independent lives for as long as possible is hugely beneficial – to older people themselves but also to the economy and society as a whole.’

Demography, Active Ageing and Pensions – Social Europe guide, volume 3 <http://ec.europa.eu/social/main.jsp?catId=738&langId=en&pubId=6805&type=2&furtherPubs=yes>

EU statistics show declining take-up of learning among 55-64 year olds (Eurostat 2009) and national data indicate that participation continues to fall in relation to age. There is a growing body of research that demonstrates the synergies between learning and improved well-being, health and engagement among older adults. Conversely factors that contribute to non-participation (dependency; ethnicity; gender; prior educational attainment e.g.) increase long-term disadvantage.

Older Europeans with the confidence and skills to learn enjoy far reaching benefits but their numbers are small.

MATURE training supports learning providers in their quest to widen participation from seniors marginalised from group activity. Understanding the impact of disadvantage and sourcing teaching solutions that contribute to improved engagement is a first step towards making adult teaching relevant and useful.

**What makes MATURE training different?**

MATURE training stimulates a specific view of the nature and value of learning. Aspects of that view will be familiar having been tried and tested at other times with other target groups. MATURE brings forward practice that works and re-packages it in a comprehensive response to an ongoing issue – how to improve participation in learning from among disadvantaged seniors.

Key features of MATURE training:

* ‘Teaching’ is not confined to ‘teachers’ nor ‘education’ to adult educators.
* ‘Learning’ has a significant part to play in assuring autonomy and independence in later life.
* Partnership work is an essential component of effective teaching and learning.
* Organisations and individuals outside education are critical in processes to engage and motivate seniors. They play an important role in the creation of learning programmes and in longer-term action-planning.
* Collaboration exists at many levels. It does not have to be subject to complex infrastructures. Informal cooperation between individuals with a shared passion can be as (or more) effective as large-scale partnership practice.
* The style and content of learning programmes must be determined by the individual needs of the people engaging with them.
* A shift in focus from subject or topic-driven learning to skills and competences that contribute to continued well-being makes learning more relevant and more accessible.
* Learning in a group is a participatory and active opportunity engaging all members on an equal footing.
* Aspirations for every learning programme should include: that participants should learn (or re-learn) how to learn; that what has been learned impacts on life.

**Who is MATURE training for?**

MATURE takes the broadest possible view of a ‘teacher of adults’ so target audiences for training include:

* professional teachers of adults;
* professional teachers from other educational sectors;
* volunteer teachers;
* individuals with a particular skill to share;
* adult education entrepreneurs (commercial providers; NGOs; companies);
* adult education planners;
* professionals and volunteers in services that do not have education as their main activity (health organisations; care workers; housing providers and services within housing, for example);
* facilitators of clubs and other informal meeting groups.

**What teacher competences does MATURE promote?**

MATURE’S training has been developed within the context of key European policy and practice relating to teacher training and lifelong learning.

The knowledge base for MATURE training will include:

* understanding of the ageing process, its advantages and disadvantages;
* recognition of the links between learning and ageing;
* comprehension of later-life issues;
* familiarity with factors that impact on engagement, participation and active longevity;
* awareness of the interrelatedness of learning and other social agendas influencing and informing the lives of older people;
* acquaintance with theories of teaching and learning applicable to older adults.

MATURE skills will embrace:

* competence in the development and delivery of engagement strategies that reach out to non-participant older adults;
* the ability to create programmes of learning that are responsive to the needs of ageing and older adults;
* the aptitude to deliver learning that motivates, inspires and draws commitment from older people;
* the talent to configure learning that is relevant and applicable to life skills;
* the flexibility to accommodate the needs of older adults within existing programmes of learning and within multi-generational learning groups.

MATURE abilities and attitudes include:

* empathy with older people;
* powers of engagement with a wide variety of individuals and organisations in the pursuit of relevant learning for older people;
* open-mindedness to new ideas; to challenging concepts and situations;
* willingness to embrace innovation; think ‘out-of-the box’; challenge pre-conceptions;
* commitment to encourage progression from learning.

**How is the self-study training programme organised?**

There are 8 units in MATURE’s self-study training programme.

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| **MATURE Self-study training programme**  |
| 1. Getting started
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| 1. Participation and non-participation
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| 1. Disadvantage
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| 1. Getting to know learners
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| 1. Planning ***relevant*** learning
 |
| 1. Delivering ***engaging*** learning
 |
| 1. Making learning ***useful*** – maintaining motivation
 |
| 1. Making learning ***useful*** – evaluation
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Each of the units contains theory and tasks to develop understanding with opportunities for personal reflection on what has been learned. References for further information and study are included.

**How to use the MATURE self-study training programme**

Self-study content has been developed to provide training suitable for a pan-European audience. Its application to particular national and local circumstance is the responsibility of the participant. The MATURE team has first-hand experience of the impact of diverse cultures, backgrounds, expectations and motivations on the training it has developed. It does not seek to impose a single European response; training is framed to stimulate reflection about the ways in which core ideas and principles might play out in differing situations.

Units for self-study may be used in any of the following ways:

* As consolidation for group continuing professional development.
* As independent professional updating.
* As part of a programme of directed self-study.

**Supporting material**

The MATURE website (<http://matureproject.eu/>) offers content and links that furnish background information and underpinning theory for trainees. On the website you will find:

* The MATURE research document (in English) that details the sources of training programme content. (<http://matureproject.eu/research-report>)
* The advice booklet for intermediaries that addresses the engagement of hard to reach older adults through the medium of third-party intervention. (<http://matureproject.eu/advice-booklet>)
* Links to a range of European sources, projects and publications that have links with later-life learning; teaching and training; issues and concerns affecting the lives of seniors. (<http://matureproject.eu/links-2>)

Much of MATURE’s work has developed from previous European projects in which partner organisations have been involved. As pre-preparation for or to complement MATURE training, you should consult:

* The LISA booklet on networking in support of later life learning <http://www.bia-net.org/lisa>
* The LENA guide on cooperative models of effective later life learning <http://www.bia-net.org/en/lena.html>
* The LARA guide on delivering teaching for ageing <http://www.laraproject.net/>
* The EuBia guide on the benefits of collaborative practice in later life learning <http://www.bia-net.org/en/eubia.html>

MATURE has also made use of the ForAge database: (<http://www.foragenetwork.eu/en/>). ForAge is a European multi-lateral network set up with the aim of communicating and promoting experiences of learning for older people. Part of its remit is to become the repository for documents and projects relating to policy, practice and research in later life learning. As such it is a prime resource for adult educators.