

# Summary of the Evaluation of EENET, 2006

## Background to the evaluation

The 2006 evaluation of the Enabling Education Network (EENET) was commissioned by Norsk Forbund for Utviklingshemmede (NFU – the Norwegian Association for Persons with Developmental Disabilities). NFU was a key donor to EENET until 2004. The overall objectives of the evaluation were:

- to review EENET's development as a network from 2000 to 2005 and assess the scope and impact of its work
- to make recommendations for EENET's future priorities and sustainability.

## Evaluation activities

An independent consultant was hired by NFU to co-ordinate the evaluation. The following main activities were carried out:

- review of EENET's annual reports, publications and other records and statistics
- distribution of a user questionnaire to all contacts in EENET's database (responses were received from Africa (66%), Asia (15%), Europe (13%), Australasia (3%), Middle East (2%), Caribbean (1%) South America (1%)).
- focus group discussions (three with EENET users in East Africa, one with EENET supporters in the UK)
- interviews with EENET's founders and other key supporters, staff, etc
- assessment of readability and usability of EENET's newsletters and website.

The evaluation of users' views on EENET focused on six key areas:

- What do inclusive education practitioners want from EENET? Do they get what they want? What more do they want? (service and expectations)
- Are EENET's aims and objectives clear to all users/supporters? (identity)
- How do users/supporters contact EENET? (access)
- Is there global support for EENET? (recognition)
- Is there a demand for regionalisation?
- What ideas are there for future organisational development?

## EENET's core principles

The evaluation noted and commended EENET's core principles. EENET's user numbers have expanded annually since its inception. This demonstrates a clear and continuing need for such a network. EENET is unique, and continues to grow in popularity, because of its founding principles. It recognises that much of the best pioneering work on inclusive education is being done, not only in resource-rich Northern countries, but also in the South. Here, despite scarce resources, individuals and groups are demonstrating innovation and resourcefulness in meeting the challenge of quality education for all.

EENET has sought to raise the profile of work in the South and to push against the mainstream view of development. It insists on being a network with an open and equal relationship with the South. It facilitates but refuses to direct. It has worked, instead, to establish an exchange of experiences and to debate central concepts of inclusion. It brings awareness to concrete, on-the-ground initiatives happening in the South.

The evaluation stated that EENET is unique in providing information support to *all* who seek it, especially those whom other organisations do not service.

"[I] first check EENET every time I go to a new country because it will give me quality, reliable information on what is concretely happening there."

## Recommendations made by the evaluation

Full details of all the evaluation findings and statistics are available from EENET. In this summary we will simply present the key recommendations and briefly explain some of the evidence upon which these recommendations were based.

### • Recommendation 1: Funding

This is an overarching recommendation. The evaluation makes a number of detailed suggestions for improving the work and scope of EENET. None of them can happen without secured funding. The evaluation specifically suggests that NFU and/or other donors should provide a 'breathing space' grant. This would enable EENET to continue its important work. But it would also enable the network to invest the necessary time and money in strengthening its funding and organisational structures (which it has not had the capacity to do in recent years).

### • Recommendation 2: Improving the design of EENET's website

An overwhelming majority of people who responded to the user questionnaire (93 per cent) stated that EENET's website generally provides them with a good range of information. No one indicated that the website offered the wrong information or the wrong format of information.

The evaluation also highlighted that an increasing number of EENET's users in the South are now accessing information through EENET's website. The website therefore needs to be redesigned to help people find

"...generally I find the webpages a bit too Africa-focused! But maybe that is also our fault! That we do not feed enough information to the web page from Asia!"

information more quickly and easily, especially if they are using a slow or expensive Internet connection. The navigation bars are confusing at the moment, and need to be simplified. Also it needs to be easier to find basic information on what EENET is, what it does, and how people can join in with networking activities.

“We use the EENET website to download publications, for regional networking and also to learn more about what other people are doing on inclusive education.”

The website is currently managed free of charge by Inclusive Technology. This is financially beneficial for EENET, since the network cannot afford the high costs of paying for website services. However, it also means that large or rapid changes to the website are not always possible. EENET therefore needs to rethink this relationship and/or find funding to pay for alternative or additional website services.

- **Recommendation 3: Review all materials for readability**

Almost all respondents to the user questionnaire (98%) said they found EENET’s materials easy to read. However, an independent readability analysis was conducted as well. This concluded that EENET’s newsletter and website articles are often not so easy to read. It found the language style in many EENET materials is equivalent to a specialist publication. This means EENET is not always achieving its aim to be a publication that non-specialists can easily read and understand. The evaluation recommended that EENET needs to work harder on making materials easy to read (e.g. shorter sentences, avoiding or explaining inclusive education jargon, etc).

“ [EENET] provided accessible, relevant, insightful information that assisted us with an international perspective to interpret our findings.”

However, the evaluation also noted that EENET does not want to become too rigid with its article selection process. It is important for the network to welcome articles from anyone and everyone who wants to have a go at writing. A very strict approach to selecting only perfectly written articles would undermine EENET’s efforts to publish work from inexperienced and grassroots writers.

- **Recommendation 4: Explaining what EENET is and what EENET does**

The user questionnaire included a list of activities. Respondents were asked to say whether they thought EENET did or did not do that activity. A surprisingly high number of people got the answers wrong. For instance, 73% of respondents thought EENET gives specific advice on disability rehabilitation services. It does not. And only 55% of respondents knew that EENET’s activities include adapting documents and helping inexperienced writers. This indicates that EENET has not done a good job of explaining its purpose and its activities. EENET therefore needs to explain more clearly what it stands for and where its information and inspiration comes from. This can be done by improving the explanations given on the website, in EENET publications, etc.

- **Recommendation 5: Building national and regional inclusive education networks**

The majority of respondents to the questionnaire and during focus group discussions felt that national and regional inclusive education networks are important. During the evaluation process, many expressed an interest in being part of regional network development. The evaluation concluded that EENET should continue supporting

“...EENET offers [a] good range of information. Our partners commend EENET for that. The information we share with partners has yielded positive results and has encouraged guardians, parents and children to have focus on inclusive education...”

existing national and regional networks. However, it also stated that EENET should be more actively involved in helping new networks to set up. EENET should provide a degree of leadership that reflects its core principles, its expertise and its special brand of networking – but that still allows regional networks to make local adaptations within the parameters of those principles. However this relates to finding more funding, since EENET’s capacity to travel and be more ‘hands-on’ is currently very restricted.

- **Recommendations 6 and 7: Reviving and changing the steering group structure, and expanding operational structures**

EENET has a simple structure – a small office in Manchester, with one-part-time staff member (for a short period it had two staff). A steering group exists to guide and advise EENET’s overall direction, and ensure that work is in keeping with the original vision. However, for financial reasons, a full meeting of the steering group has not happened since 2002. This means that in recent years, most of the decisions about EENET’s direction have been made by the staff, with little additional guidance.

The evaluation concludes that the broadening of perspectives that an advisory steering group brings is important, so the group should be revived and extended. However, for this to happen there needs to be an expansion in the number of staff who can implement work suggested by the group. An alternative is to create an intermediary body that would not be simply advisory. This body could help with implementation as well as taking forward some of the ideas generated by the advisory steering group, on a ‘need for action’ basis.

“ [EENET’s] strength is also in its conscious reflection about and decision to continue to go upstream and not to become mainstream. It underestimates itself and how far ahead it really is of the debate on inclusion...”.

EENET needs to discover an overall structure that enables it to expand its work, document its operations, yet retain its friendly and personal approach to people, for which it was highly praised during the evaluation.

- **Recommendation 8: Setting up independently of the University of Manchester**

“...the credibility that the academic framework provides should not be under-estimated.”

EENET is not an independent registered charity or trust. It is housed within the University of Manchester and its staff are officially considered university employees. Yet EENET raises all its own funding and pays some overhead costs to the University. The

University provides some benefits to EENET, such as covering most postage costs. But such benefits are not laid out in a contract and so are not guaranteed each year. The evaluation highlighted that EENET users and supporters value the fact the EENET can bridge the gap between both the academic and NGO camps while managing to remain neutral. Its university location also offers EENET a degree of respect and recognition, and the university has never interfered with EENET's work. However, the university location was found to be a barrier to fundraising, with some donors unwilling or unable to channel funding through an academic institution rather than a registered charity.

The evaluation states that, while the safety and status provided by the University in EENET's initial years was valuable, its location is now also a barrier to progress, and does not offer sufficient support to the achievement of EENET's objectives. EENET therefore needs to look again at the possibility of becoming a charity or trust. It should also explore partnership options with other universities/organisations in the South and the North. Neither option need rule out a continued relationship with the University of Manchester.

"[EENET] has been very good at maintaining its independence and not getting co-opted (into university/academic work/approaches)."

• **Recommendation 9: Staffing levels**

EENET currently has one part-time co-ordinator. At its largest it had one full-time and one-part time worker, for a period of three years. Evaluation respondents confirmed that EENET's small size is part of the reason for its success and for its continued personal, friendly and inclusive approach to networking. This personal approach is what makes EENET unique and valuable in the field of inclusive education, and this should be guarded. However, the evaluation states that the number of staff is now holding back EENET's potential to contribute to inclusive education debates, especially within major national and international policy arenas. It states that EENET should gradually expand to a staff of three to six people (a size considered by Northern supporters to be the optimum).

"...actually the fact that [EENET] had to struggle with funds and stay small has been difficult but has also meant that [it] learnt to be efficient and effective. The staff has been tremendously creative in how it has used its resources."

• **Recommendation 10: Financial support from donors and Northern partners**

Finding funding has never been easy for EENET, often because its unique approach to networking and information-sharing is not well understood and has few comparable examples in the development sector. Those donors that already understand and value EENET have been very supportive. But bringing new donors on board has been a struggle. Northern organisations have also tended to take EENET for granted, using and valuing its services but not recognising the real costs involved. The evaluation highlighted that such organisations need to help secure EENET financially. Over recent years, EENET has relied increasingly on income earned through consultancy work. This has brought essential income, but has often diverted staff time away from essential EENET activities.

"...we have always seen EENET as a resource, but not as a partner to whom we also have something to share. I think we could do a lot more in terms of sharing our own experiences, instead of always asking EENET for input."

EENET needs a 'breathing space' to pursue some of the strategies and structural changes highlighted by the evaluation (e.g. geographical expansion, increased translations, more activities to share its skills in materials production, research, filling the gap between grassroots work and policy, etc). This breathing space needs to come in the form of secured three-to-five year funding.

The evaluation suggested some other possible strategies that could help EENET's financial position:

1. Partnering with other universities in Southern countries, with a view to moving some of EENET's operations to the South, while retaining a UK office.
2. Creating a small pool of EENET-approved consultants with diverse skills/specialisations. In return for getting work through EENET, these consultants would pay a fee to EENET. Northern NGOs indicate they are in need of 'quality-assured' consultants in inclusive education and want EENET to assist with this.
3. Taking on an intern – once there are staff to supervise them. This would enable staff to engage in income-generating consultancies.
4. Charging more when Northern donors are paying for materials, and reviewing EENET's approach to branding its work and outputs.
5. Exploring the possibility of charging an annual supporter/membership fee, on a sliding scale, to richer Northern NGOs (who have indicated a willingness to participate in such a scheme).
6. EENET could expand and better promote its own production of materials on issues of inclusion, training, writing and editing, etc, to earn more income from users in the North. This must always be balanced with EENET's core principle of promoting the work/voices of people in the South.
7. Getting its donors to look for 'basket-funding', where funds are made available not just to one organisation but to a sector or an issue on which a few organisations might work together.
8. Making more formal approaches to Northern supporters to explain the funding situation and encourage them to lobby for funds within their organisations, which would be given on a 'no-strings' basis.

- **Recommendation 11: EENET should lead and support regionalisation in the context of branding**

As mentioned in Recommendation 5, regional networks are a vital part of EENET's future development. The evaluation highlighted that regionalisation needs to occur within a framework in which EENET provides a degree of leadership. This leadership needs to reflect the network's core principles, its expertise and its own special brand (unique type) of networking.

- **Recommendation 12: EENET must look at the issue of branding**

A brand is a way of identifying what an organisation or a product stands for. It helps users to know what is distinctive, original, unique and different about that particular organisation or product. In the case of EENET, the branding can signify its particular

approach to inclusion for which the network is valued. Branding can lead to rigidity and uniformity, which EENET seeks to avoid. However, in light of the funding challenges that EENET faces, it must reconsider doing more branding and selling of its expertise and materials (while guarding against losing its current identity in the process).

"...I feel their responsiveness to everyone, not just to the big shots, is what is unique and what would be most missed about EENET: that it supports the lone teacher, the lone head teacher... its responsiveness to those who are not a part of the system".

The evaluation highlighted that, while EENET is doing a good job, it could do so much more if it had more resources. Some possible priority areas of work for EENET to consider, based on the feedback received from users and supporters, include:

- **Providing more analysis**, instead of just offering information for readers to analyse in their own way (though still guard against dictating a rigid position).
- **Extending its action research work.**
- **Offering more opportunities for or facilitating face-to-face interaction**, through EENET's increased presence in the field.
- **Working in more languages.**
- **Helping other networks and donors** to understand how to introduce the concept and idea of inclusive education to government officials so that they begin to work inter-sectorally.
- **Providing more guidance on programme development:** linking communities with their national systems and encouraging the systems to be more inter-linked.
- **Offering more training 'in the EENET way'** (e.g. in inclusive practices, action research, presentation and editing skills, materials and newsletter production, involving the community, etc).
- **Facilitating the development of strong links between community-based organisations and 'educators and education'** in the South, so that informal education is better understood and promoted.
- **Offering 'training of trainers' workshops** on advocacy, promoting promising practices, challenging the status quo to push for South-led initiatives.
- **Facilitating links, including cross-organisational links** between the big donors and players such as the World Bank, UNESCO and the implementers in the field as well as other NGOs.
- **Repackaging academic papers to make them more accessible.**
- **Acting as a mentor and adviser** on inclusion and communication to Northern NGOs and Southern organisations setting up their own networks.

"...we have used the information from more disadvantaged countries to convince some die-hards that education works even with minimal resources".

## Selected statistics from the evaluation questionnaire results

### Why did/do you contact EENET?

Reason	%
To learn more about inclusive education generally	79
To request inclusive education publications / EENET newsletters	67
To find out the latest news about inclusive education	66
To get information on new publications	55
To make links to others working in the same field	55
For training ideas	51
To find out the latest news about EENET's work	51
To share information about your own work	40
To discuss national/regional networking and information sharing	38
To find out about any forthcoming events	35
To find documents in other languages	17
To offer funding, voluntary help or other support activities	17
Other	3

### What resources have you received from EENET?

Resource	%
Printed EENET newsletter	92
Materials on CD-ROM	61
Miscellaneous printed documents	38
Electronic materials via email	36
Video materials	15
Audio-tape and/or Braille materials	13
Translated documents	11
Nothing	6

### Why did/do you visit the EENET website?

Reason	%
To learn more about inclusive education generally	83
To find out news about inclusive education	78
To get information on NEW publications	71
To find documents on specific issues within IE	66
To download existing publications	51
To find out about links to others working in the same field	51
For training ideas	46
To find out news about EENET's work	43
To find out about any forthcoming events	40
To find out about regional networking	40
To find documents in other languages	13
Other	1

**How well does EENET achieve its objective of improving access to information, on a scale from 1 = ‘not at all’ to 5 = ‘extremely well’?**

- 67 per cent marked either 4 or 5
- 29 per cent were moderately happy
- 4 per cent felt EENET does not achieve its aim

**Did EENET, or the information it provides, help with developing your inclusive education work?**

- 78 per cent said it did, stating that EENET/information provided had helped with policy development, planning their strategy, activities, etc.

**How did/do you contact EENET?**

Method	%
Email	74
Letter	45
Telephone	12
Face-to-face discussions with EENET staff	12
Fax	4

**How often do you use EENET?**

Frequency	%
Several times a year	45
About once a month/more than once a month	46
Never	6

**How often do you visit EENET’s website?**

Frequency	%
More often than once a month	35
A few times a year, or less frequently	29
About once a month, on average	24
I don’t know	6
Never	6

**Contributing to EENET**

- 39% stated they had contacted EENET to assist it, for example, in volunteering, distributing the newsletter, collecting case studies, providing funding, etc.

**Promoting EENET**

- 87% said they had encouraged others to use the network (e.g. through linking their website to EENET’s, mentioning EENET verbally or in their newsletters and/or other literature, distributing EENET’s newsletter, etc)
- 92% of those who had not encouraged others to use EENET said they had not thought of doing so, but might/would in future
- 94% said that they had shared resources supplied by EENET with others.

## What do you think EENET does?

Activity	True or False	% respondents who gave the correct answer
<i>EENET helps:</i>		
• other organisations to find consultants	True	47
• people to learn sign language	False	69
• students to enrol in Manchester University	False	79
• people to contact others working on IE	True	85
<i>EENET gives advice on:</i>		
• disability rehabilitation services	False	27
• running study tours	True	25
• fundraising	False	80
• start/run local/regional information-sharing network	True	83
• education solutions for individual children	False	49
<i>EENET's documentation activities include:</i>		
• adapting documents and helping new writers	True	55
• publishing/distributing an annual newsletter	True	93
• encouraging people to translate documents	True	64
• free distribution of documents to the South	True	88
<i>Other EENET activities include:</i>		
• implementing inclusive education projects/schools	False	43
• managing email groups	True	39
• responding to correspondence/enquiries about IE	True	93
• running training courses if asked to do so (i.e. hired as consultants)	True	36
• providing grants or sponsorship	False	85