



## LEONARDO ECON-IT

# Market Assessment Report EBN- European Union



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### **1. Introduction**

This document has been produced within the framework of the Leonardo Initiative under the ECON it project within WP1. The main aim of WP1 is to identify the strengths and weaknesses of the current structures for business advisor training in the European Union.

The report is structured in the following way:

- Section 2, Background Information, describes in a very general way the structure of the sector
- Section 3, Methodology, explains the steps followed for the preparation of the report
- Section 4, Quantitative Analysis, presents the numeric results from the application of the questionnaires
- Section 5, Conclusions, merges the output of the questionnaires with the focus group and desk based research outcomes to provide the picture of the Business Advisors training environment
- Section 6, Recommendations, summarizes in a structured way the results of the two previous sections
- Annex 1, List of Participants, contains the list of organizations involved in the study.

### **2. Background Information**

The current report has been gathered mainly amongst the members of EBN, the European Network of Business Innovation Centres (BICs). Therefore, we should firstly consider the specific environment of a BIC, in particular with regard to its basic role and its general mission.

The basic role: to help create new enterprises, from innovative projects selected for their realism and ambition in market terms, and to guarantee the development of existing high value-added SMEs leading to a significant creation of employment.

The general mission is to implement a comprehensive range of technical assistance and logistic aids with a view to contributing towards the creation and development of innovative enterprises.

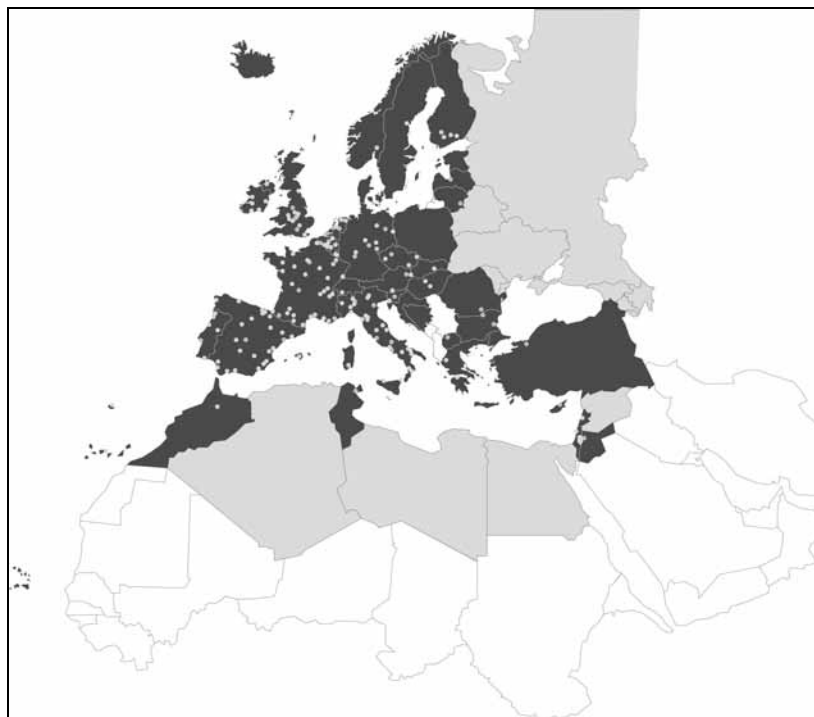
Training is one such form of assistance within the general mission of the BIC. In this line, training had to be provided for the enterprise creator in a manner consistent with the BIC's overall operation and its general strategy.

This means co-operating closely with the internal BIC project leaders (business advisers) who are supervising the development of business plans and, in more general terms, supporting the BIC's initiatives aimed at helping with the creation and development of enterprises.

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In terms of geographical coverage, the following map shows the distribution and location of the EBN members.



Source: EBN, 2006

### **Business Support Organisations: BICs**

The European Community Business and Innovation Centres (EC BICs) – as they are officially known – are support organisations for innovative small and medium sized businesses (SMEs) and entrepreneurs. They are recognised by the European Commission through a quality certification scheme, which enables them to obtain the European “EC BIC” label. Operating in the public interest, they are set up by the principal economic operators in an area or region, in order to offer a range of integrated guidance and support services for projects carried out by innovative SMEs, thereby contributing to regional and local development. The BICs are grouped together within the European BIC Network (EBN)<sup>1</sup>.

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<sup>1</sup> European Commission “The European Business and Innovation Centres- An Instrument to assist regional development”, pg. 9.

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Between the mid 1980s and mid 1990s the BICs were more likely to be created as a completely new entity than to be set up within an existing organisation. This trend was reversed in the mid 1990s<sup>2</sup>. The table below presents the information about the year in which individual BICs started their activities.

	1985 - 1990	1991 - 1995	1996-2000	2001 - 2005	2005 -
BICs created as a new entity	19,85% <sup>3</sup>	27,94%	11,03%	7,35%	0,74%
BICs set-up in an existing organisation	2,94%	5,15%	10,29%	13,24%	1,47%

### Financial orientation of BICs

Not for profit	83%
For profit	17%

### 3. Methodology

Following the structure described in the ECON-IT application submitted to the Leonardo Programme and the conclusions of the first partner's meeting, the steps followed to build this study have been:

- Adaptation of the questionnaire for Business advisors. This questionnaire has been answered by 10 business advisors, consultants, BIC managers via face to face interviews.
- Adaptation of the questionnaire for Business support organisations. This This questionnaire has been answered by 10 business support organisations, mainly BICs via face to face interviews.
- Identification of key issues from the answered questionnaires
- Focus group meeting with representatives from the answered questionnaires to discussed issues previously discussed

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<sup>2</sup> EBN "Interim Observatory: The BIC Network Results in 2006", pg.3

<sup>3</sup> Figures are expressed as a percentage of the whole network



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- Desk based research carried out during and after the collection of questionnaires and the focus group. This has been done via consultation with the organizations and business advisers that answered to the questionnaires and access to internet resources and EBN library.
- All the collected information has been analyzed to produce the conclusions and recommendations section of this report.

Bearing in mind the European nature of EBN, the sample includes the following EU countries

- Ireland
- Italy
- Spain
- Hungary
- Switzerland
- Germany

Most of the questionnaires were carried out during face to face meetings in the period from 20th to 22nd June during the EBN Congress held in Canterbury, UK. As well, follow up was carried out by phone and email in order to clarify some of the comments.

An informal focus group gathered further input from Business Support Organisations on the main issue: formal/informal training for business advisers. The following topics were discussed: at what level this training should be carried, qualifications given, support from business support organizations, available public funding.

As well, the interest of these organizations in participating in the testing phase and their comments on the website were discussed.

The focus group conclusions are included within the conclusions of the report.

In the following pages we will see how is the training given in the BICs to business advisers; internally at both a theoretical level by providing knowledge and at a practical level through the development of managerial skills. Training in a BIC is provided in line with the general strategy and operation of the BIC itself.

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### 4. Quantitative Analysis

#### 4.1 Questionnaire for Business Advisors

<b>Do you practice as a Business Advisor under the auspices of a professional body?</b>		
<b>Answer</b>	<b>%</b>	<b>Comments</b>
Yes	44.4%	The answer given is lower than 50% as the responses from the Italian organisations were 0%.
No		

<b>How do you undertake continuing professional development (CPD)</b>	
<b>Answer</b>	<b>Comments</b>
	Training within the organisations they work in, conferences, desk research, study tours, Chamber of Commerce, European University, internet, on-line courses,

<b>Are there any training courses or further education provided for B.As. in your area?</b>		
<b>Answer</b>	<b>%</b>	<b>Comments</b>
Yes	50%	It seems that northern countries have this possibility, whereas the answer from the business advisers in the Southern part of Europe is not homogeneous and no clear trend can be identified.
No	50%	

<b>Are you aware of other surveys or research taking place into the training needs of B.As</b>		
<b>Answer</b>	<b>%</b>	<b>Comments</b>
Yes	10%	Very low knowledge of the existence of surveys or research on training needs of BAs.
No	90%	

<b>What kind of business advisory training materials do you use</b>	
<b>Answer</b>	<b>Comments</b>
	On-line training, slide presentations, internet

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<b>Do you have any knowledge about globally EU approved training programmes for B. A.</b>		
<b>Answer</b>	<b>%</b>	<b>Comments</b>
Yes	30%	Improve project(DG Enterprise, Europe Innova Initiative) ISO System EFQM System Achieve (EU funded Initiative) VIVA
No	70%	

<b>What are your thoughts on the development of e-learning materials for B.As</b>		
<b>Answer</b>	<b>%</b>	<b>Comments</b>
Very useful	40%	80% of the respondents believe that development of e-learning material for Business Advisers are useful or very useful.
Moderately useful	40%	
Not useful	20%	

<b>Do you find it necessary to introduce any kind of Quality Insurance Policy for B.As</b>		
<b>Answer</b>	<b>%</b>	<b>Comments</b>
Yes	77.78%	Quality is highly rated as a main characteristic that business advisers should have.
No	22.22%	

<b>Are you interested in how other EU countries provide training/further education to B.As.</b>		
<b>Answer</b>	<b>%</b>	<b>Comments</b>
Yes	80%	ECON-it proves again its value as on learning tool in which links to different programmes and initiatives would be of interest to Business Advisers
No	20%	

<b>Getting to know other countries provision of B.A. training and CPD would help your work</b>		
<b>Answer</b>	<b>%</b>	<b>Comments</b>
Yes	90%	Only one business advisor did not see clearly the impact on CPD on his work
No	10%	

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<b>Which training models do you give preference to</b>		
<b>Answer</b>	<b>%</b>	<b>Comments</b>
Participation	80%	A high percentage included both options as the best combination. It seems to confirm that e-learning training needs to be reinforced by courses.
Internet	80%	

<b>Like to take part in operating an international interactive web based training portal for B.As</b>		
<b>Answer</b>	<b>%</b>	<b>Comments</b>
Yes	80%	There is an interest on participating in operating an international interactive web base but a number of negative responses referred to the type of web based portal that would be developed.
No	20%	

<b>Necessary to publish your own and other countries training programmes for B.As/SMEs</b>		
<b>Answer</b>	<b>%</b>	<b>Comments</b>
Yes	60%	Some of the respondents did not see the added value of publishing their training programmes due to the fact that this action would take a considerable amount of human resources.
No	40%	

<b>How many entrepreneurs ready to develop does a B.A. keep regular personal contacts with</b>	
<b>Answer</b>	<b>Comments</b>
	Average response was between 5 to 10

<b>Are you able to reimburse the expenses of your trainings without any support and by SMEs</b>		
<b>Answer</b>	<b>%</b>	<b>Comments</b>
Yes	44.44%	The main support on subsidises comes from the government and then business associations.
No	55.56%	

### 4.2 Questionnaire for Business Support Organizations

<b>Are there concrete research results for the governmental support of Business Advisors</b>		
<b>Answer</b>	<b>%</b>	<b>Comments</b>
Yes	20%	
No	80%	

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<b>What kind of media provides public sector support organisations with information on the training/development needs of B.A.</b>		
<b>Answer</b>	<b>%</b>	<b>Comments</b>
Media	10	The total adds to more than 100% as some organisations selected more than 1 answer. It is clear that conferences are the type of media that scores the highest.
Advisory networks	30	
Labour organizations	10	
Conferences	50	
Other	20	
No idea	30	

<b>Do you feel public sector support organisations should encourage and support the formation of B.A. networks</b>		
<b>Answer</b>	<b>%</b>	<b>Comments</b>
Yes	90%	There is a strong opinion about the need of support in the formation of Business Advisers Networks.
No	10%	

<b>Is there a role for public sector support organisations to oversee the CPD of B.A.s</b>		
<b>Answer</b>	<b>%</b>	<b>Comments</b>
Yes	90%	

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### 5. Conclusions

The analysis of the questionnaires shows that ECON it is one of the very few European Initiatives that currently is looking at the training of business advisers at a pan European level. Possibly synergies and collaborations (i.e website links) with other European Projects and initiatives by industrial players should be made. Currently the BIC Network seems to be the only European Business Support Organisation network that has a homogenised system on Training at European level.

In terms of **European projects**, the desk research revealed that a number of European projects carry some type of training. The most relevant ones for ECON it are briefly described as follows:

#### **Improve**

Improve<sup>4</sup> falls under the Europe Innova family of projects supported by the European Commission, DG Enterprise and Industry. The project Improve looks at innovation management. This European project supports intermediaries by providing them with content to their clients. Moreover, national and European benchmarks are the basis for future activities. The process can be summarised in the following steps:

- Self assessment, which can be either quick assessment or in-depth assessment.
- Benchmarking report.
- Consulting Workshop.
- Quality assessment after Consulting Workshop.
- Quality assessment 9 months after.
- Recurring assessment

Although this tool mainly targets SMEs, business advisers should be aware of it as a European benchmarking tool on Innovation Management.

#### **VIVA**

The VIVA<sup>5</sup> project aims at setting up a European Virtual Center for Innovation Excellence Assessment (VIVA). This project is of interest for ECON it as it could be a source of information in which to draw upon as it consists of a toolbox ready to be consulted by SMEs and business advisers. This initiative is supported by the European Commission, DG Research.

In terms of **Industrial players** the Microenterprise Acceleration Institute (HP) builds on expertise and know how built on Curriculum and trainings. Already the following type of users are involved in this initiative: universities, Business Innovation Centres, chambers of commerce, independent practitioners and consultants.

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<sup>4</sup> For further information please go to: [www.improve-innovation.eu](http://www.improve-innovation.eu)

<sup>5</sup> For further information on the project, please go to: [www.viva-eu.net](http://www.viva-eu.net)



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Therefore, ECON it has to take into account the fact that a number of industrial players are working regionally towards Curriculum accreditation.

In terms of **BICs** internal and external training can be found.

The advantages of using internal resources are:

- The potential for introducing other support services provided in the BIC
- clear knowledge and no “double agendas”.

The choice of external instructors is at the same time important as it will determine the success of the training and, thereby, the brand image of the training programme. The potential instructors could be grouped in four categories: teachers from institutes or universities, business executives and managers, training consultants and technicians.

Notwithstanding the selection of the training personnel, a key issue of training for BICs is to ensure the permanent availability of the training programmes.

Finally, we can draw the overall conclusion that no formal business adviser training exists at a pan European level. There have been initiatives at regional and national level but that are not sustainable and do not continue over the lifetime of the public funding.

  
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**6.Recommendations**

A number of recommendations have been gathered by EBN following the work carried out in the survey analysis.

- There is no formal training for business advisers at a European level in the lines of action that ECON-it partnership is currently working.
- The BIC training was developed for the network and is applied currently by over 150 full members and should be taken into consideration for the development of the ECON-it training
- There is no pan European accreditation for business advisers provided by a European body.
- Public support should be available for the training needs of business advisers.
- The survey shows the gap that exists on training available for business advisers. 80% of the respondents believe that development of e-learning material for Business Advisers are useful or very useful.

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### ***Annex 1- List of organizations and Business advisers participating in the survey***

<b>Organisation</b>	<b>Country</b>	<b>Type of organisation</b>
Westbic	Ireland	BIC
BIC Friuli Venezia Giulia	Italy	BIC
Mainstrat	Spain	Business adviser
Sviluppo Italia Sicilia	Italy	Business Support Organisation
Innostart	Hungary	BIC
BIC Frankfurt Oder	Germany	BIC
Cimark	Switzerland	BIC
Fundecyt	Spain	Regional Development Agency
BIC Lazio	Italy	BIC
CEEI Talavera de la Reina	Spain	BIC
<b>Business Adviser</b>	<b>Country</b>	<b>Type of organisation Organisation</b>
Seamus McCormack	Ireland	BIC
Giorgio Gerometta	Italy	BIC
Oscar Rodriguez	Spain	Business adviser
Giuseppe Glorioso	Italy	Business Support Organisation
Judit Szilbereky	Hungary	BIC
Uwe Hoppe	Germany	BIC
Eric Plan	Switzerland	BIC
Manon van Leeuwen	Spain	Regional Development Agency
Guendalina Pecile	Italy	BIC
Luis Miguel Valle	Spain	BIC
Jacques Pronk	Netherlands	Business Adviser