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# APPEARANCE MATTERS

"Optimizing the outcomes for vocational guidance counseling and vocational training"

## LIFELONG LEARNING PROGRAMME



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## INTRODUCTION

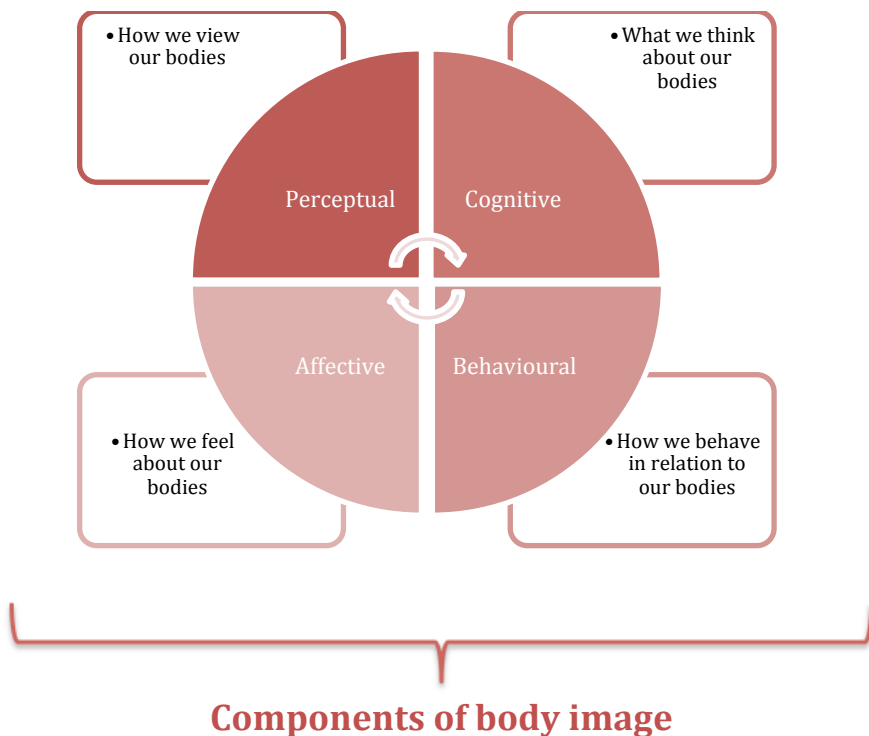
A critical body of evidence now demonstrates that people who are distressed about their appearance can experience a range of negative effects, including lowered self-esteem, emotional distress, health risk behaviours, negative physical and/or mental health, poor educational outcomes and social exclusion. Until recently, levels of awareness about these impacts has been low in the vocational training context, however, trainees and clients with significant levels of appearance dissatisfaction may experience detrimental effects in relation to their psychological health, social experiences and/or physical health, and may be difficult to counsel and support in becoming self-activated. In addition, trainees and clients who have an appearance which is different to the norm (for example, as the result of trauma, birth anomalies, skin conditions or following surgery) may experience stigma in their dealings with

others and in relation to their employment prospects. If service providers have a limited understanding of the factors contributing to appearance related distress and of the consequences of this, they are likely to be less able to provide the appropriate guidance or vocational training to optimize outcomes for their trainees or clients. The objective of this project has therefore been to develop training materials designed to increase knowledge and understanding in vocational trainers and guidance counsellors, to enable them to recognise clients with risk factors and/or symptoms of appearance dissatisfaction and to provide them with hints and tips about how to address these issues.

To this end, health psychologists together with vocational trainers and guidance counsellors from 6 countries – Austria, Italy, Lithuania, Norway, Sweden and United Kingdom, have developed the training resources that accompany this booklet.

# BODY IMAGE & APPEARANCE DISSATISFACTION

The term 'body image' refers to how an individual thinks, feels and behaves in relation to their body and appearance. It is a multidimensional construct consisting of perceptual, cognitive (thought processes), affective (feelings) and behavioural components (1).



Body image is one component of a person's self-concept (the person's view or understanding of him or herself) and also contributes to the person's self esteem (the person's overall judgement of his or her own self-worth). Contributions to a well-balanced and diverse self-concept can come from a variety of domains, including appearance, performance at school or at work, friendships, sporting ability and leisure activities.

In these cases, the person's self esteem will be derived from an evaluation of their performance and contribution in a variety of spheres. If that person 'takes a hit' or experiences a challenge in one domain (for example, if someone else makes a derogatory comment about the person's appearance), then other domains will act as a 'fall-back' for the person to maintain self-esteem.

However, due to pressures such as those from the media, fashion and beauty industries, increasing numbers of people are defining themselves (self concept) and evaluating themselves to an ever -increasing degree (self

–esteem) in relation to their appearance. A more restricted number of domains in a person’s self-concept increases vulnerability to low self esteem, as if the person experiences a challenge to their esteem in the domain of appearance, s/he will have little to fall back on.

A disproportionate focus on appearance can also lead to the devaluation of other self-attributes, including intelligence and self-determination. A Canadian study (2) found, for example, that 20% of a sample of 197 adolescent girls thought their body shape and weight were the most important influence on their feelings of self-worth; more important than friendships, romantic relationships, competence at school, personal development and competence in activities other than their school work.

## IMPACTS OF APPEARANCE DISSATISFACTION

The mental health of young people continues to be a major cause of concern in Europe (4). In recent large scale studies of teenagers, negative body image has been cited as a principal component and predictor of lowered self esteem, emotional distress (5) and depression (6). For young European people between the ages of 15 to 24, there has been a pronounced deterioration in mental health. There is an increase of symptoms such as unease, anxiety, sadness, sleep disorders and hospital care to treat depression or self harm (4, 7) and in a recent study of 77,000 adults in the UK, over 60% felt ashamed of how they looked (8).

There are now well established links between appearance concerns and a number of health-compromising behaviours, including drug and alcohol misuse (9), the avoidance or over-indulgence in exercise and the non-medical use of steroids to increase muscle

bulk in males (10, 11). Young people with poor body image initiate and continue smoking as an appetite suppressant (12).

Many individuals engage in disordered patterns of eating, fasting or skipping meals and/or using laxatives, diuretics and diet pills (13) in order to reduce their weight. The consequences of poor nutrition can influence educational performance. It is established, for example, that restrictive eating is associated with a range of detrimental cognitive effects, including those relating to attention-span and memory.

Students with lower grades are more likely to report that body image concerns interfered with their academic performance (14). Lovegrove & Rumsey (15) found 31% of UK teenagers avoid classroom debate and 20% absent themselves from school when they lack confidence about their appearance. Recent research indicates that 50% of males and 70% of adolescent boys want to change their body weight or shape.



People who are overweight and are victims of weight stigma are more likely to report lower levels of psychosocial wellbeing than their peers (16).

Appearance issues may be particularly challenging for migrants and others changing cultural contexts, and may contribute to social exclusion. People from other socially disadvantaged groups may also be disproportionately affected. Girls from lower performing schools place more importance on being attractive compared with girls from higher performing schools.



## PURPOSE OF THIS PROJECT

The innovative nature of this project lies in applying knowledge about the causes and consequences of appearance dissatisfaction to the context of vocational training and guidance counselling. By increasing the awareness of trainers and counsellors, this project aims to both to reduce discrimination in these settings and to optimise outcomes for service users.

Although previously members of this consortium have produced training and recommendations for vocational guidance in the areas of age, low paid work, refugees and migrants, and people at risk of social exclusion from other causes, our research indicated a gap in the training market in relation to this important area.

The negative impacts of disfigurement and appearance dissatisfaction in the general population are broad

ranging and include psychosocial issues, educational performance and/or being discriminated against in a society obsessed with 'looks'. It is highly relevant that vocational trainers and counsellors understand these effects in order to give the best possible support to their clients.

Thus the project provides a new learning opportunity, aimed at knowledge acquisition and skills development for vocational guidance counsellors and vocational training providers. The materials are designed to foster understanding and to generate potential solutions to the problems associated with appearance-related distress and discrimination for those wishing to access the labour market or vocational education and training, but who are hampered by their actual appearance or by their feelings about the way they look.

# PROJECT OUTCOMES

The project developed 7 training modules for vocational trainers and guidance counsellors together with a Theoretical report, National reports and a Synthesis report. The content of the modules is as follows:

## **Module 1**

### **Does Appearance Matter?**

Focus of module:

1. How appearance influences the judgements we make about ourselves and others
2. The nature, frequency and consequences of appearance-related concerns

Module includes:

- Classroom-based exercises, discussion points, video clip & optional activities

- References to research relating to young people & adults; people who look different to the 'norm' (eg those with disfigurement)

## Content:

- Role of appearance in everyday life
  - How we recognise ourselves and others
  - First impressions & judgements of others
  - How we present ourselves to others
- (Dis)satisfaction with appearance
  - Who has appearance concerns?
  - Appearance-related beliefs; role of the media
  - Looking different; living with disfigurement
  - Consequences of dissatisfaction with appearance

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## Module 2

### Psychological Impacts of Appearance Dissatisfaction

Focus of module:

- Emotions (feelings), cognitive (thoughts) & behaviours associated with appearance dissatisfaction

Module includes:

- Classroom based exercises; topics for discussion; tips for trainers/facilitators

Content:

- Reasons for experiencing self-consciousness in relation to appearance
- Psychological impacts of dissatisfaction with appearance
  - Emotional impacts (feelings)
  - Cognitive impacts (thoughts)
  - Impacts on behaviours (for example, social functioning; avoidance of social situations)
  - Appearance dissatisfaction over the lifespan
- Positive impacts of looking different

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## **Module 3:**

### **The Impact of Appearance Dissatisfaction on Health**

Focus of module:

- How and why appearance dissatisfaction can influence health behaviours (eg smoking; diet; exercise)
- How health behaviours might impact on appearance
- How appearance issues might be relevant when promoting physical health

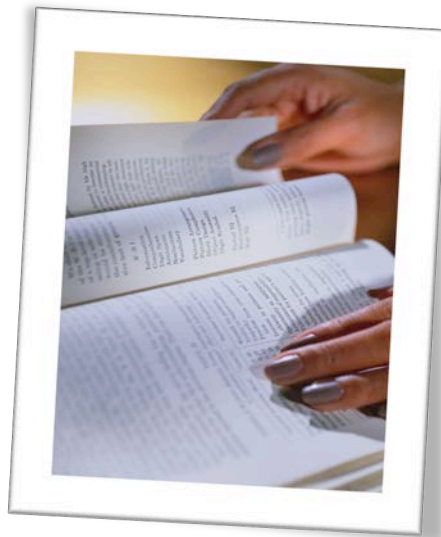
Module includes:

- Classroom-based activities; tips for trainers

Content:

- The impact of appearance ideals in the media on health-related behaviours
  - Smoking
    - Appearance and smoking
    - The impact of smoking on appearance
  - Physical activity

- The (complex) relationship between appearance & physical activity
  - Eating and dieting
    - Appearance dissatisfaction and dietary restriction; dietary supplements; steroid use
- Acting as a role model & promoting a healthy lifestyle to students & trainees





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## **Module 4:**

### **Appearance Dissatisfaction & Social Disadvantage**

#### Focus of Module:

- Risk factors for appearance dissatisfaction in people from socially disadvantaged groups
- The role of appearance in impression formation & stereotyping (with reference to socially disadvantaged groups)
- Ways of supporting trainees and accessing appropriate resources

#### Module includes:

- Topics for discussion; examples relating to ethnicity, cultural differences, disfigurement.

#### Content:

- The role of dissatisfaction with appearance in social disadvantage
- Risk factors for appearance dissatisfaction in socially disadvantaged groups
  - Cultural norms & beliefs
  - Socio-economic circumstances

- Psychological vulnerability
- Responses of others
  - Forming impressions
  - Influencing first impressions
  - Appearance talk



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## **Module 5:**

### **Interventions Designed to Improve Body Image**

Focus of module:

- Potential targets for intervention
- Frameworks used to guide interventions
- Activities to encourage self-confidence in relation to appearance

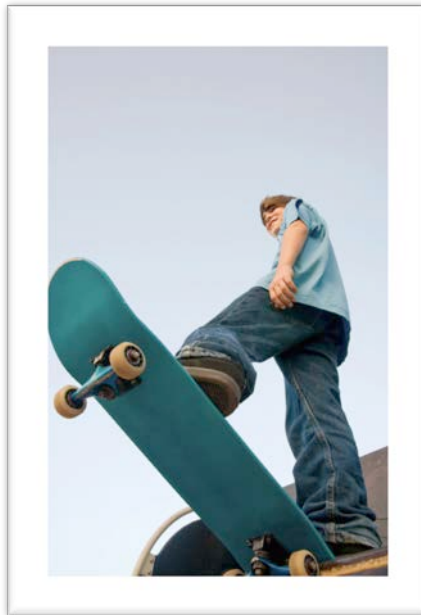
Module includes:

- Information about resources to supplement interventions; classroom based activities; video clips; ideas for additional activities; summaries of evidence

Content:

- Targets for intervention
  - Changing the physical & social environment
  - Individuals & group interventions
- Framing the content & delivery of interventions
  - Targeting risk-factors
    - Media literacy approaches
    - Addressing the impact of peers

- Cognitive dissonance approaches
- Relevant resources
- Tips for trainers:
  - Encouraging appearance confidence



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## **Module 6:**

### **How to Recognise Symptoms of Appearance-Related Distress**

Focus of module:

- Reviewing 'objective' indicators of distress
  - How useful are physical indicators?
  - Observing behaviour
  - Psychometric assessments
- Subjective indicators of distress
  - Thoughts and beliefs

Module includes:

- Classroom based examples, activities and discussion points; research evidence

Content:

- Objective indicators of distress
  - Physical indicators
    - The severity (extent) of a difference in appearance
    - The location (body site) of a difference in appearance

- Observing behaviour
- Psychometric assessments
  - Which aspects are and are not assessed by standardised measures?
- Subjective indicators of distress
  - Self perceptions



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## **Module 7:**

### **Intervention: Approaches & Sources of Support**

Focus of module:

- The continuum from ‘normative discontent’ to extreme appearance dissatisfaction
- How to recognise & discuss ‘excessive’ appearance-related concerns
- Understanding treatment approaches
- Sources of additional support

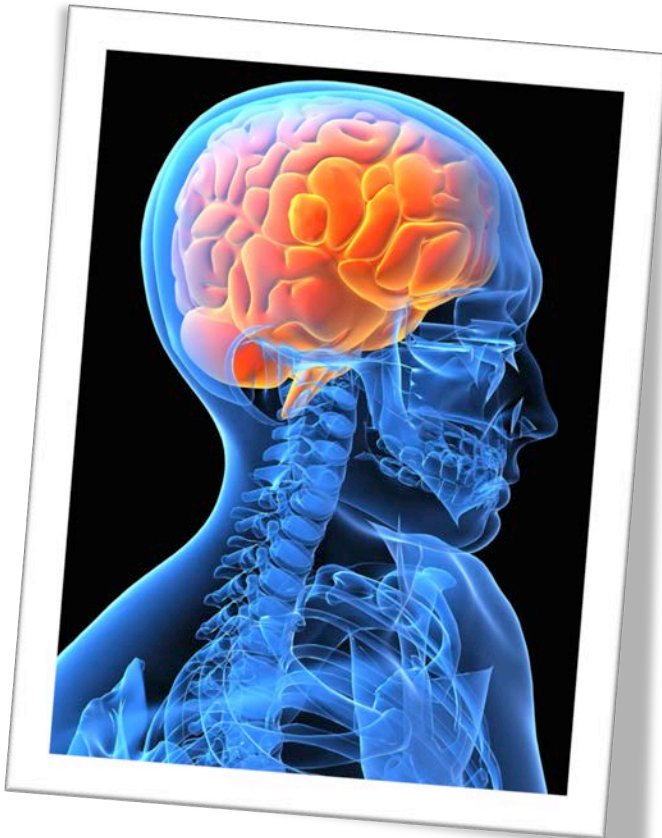
Module includes:

- Classroom based activities & discussion points; information about additional forms of support & resources

Content:

- When is dissatisfaction about appearance ‘normal’ and when should it be a concern?
  - Impacts on daily life
  - Impacts on beliefs, thoughts, feelings & mood
- Approaches to treatment

- Biomedical approaches
- Psychological approaches
  - Cognitive behavioural model





## USING THE TRAINING MATERIALS

In this section, information is provided for trainers and facilitators about how the Appearance Matters training modules might be used in the context of providing training for vocational guidance counsellors and vocational trainers. Hints and tips about discussing appearance dissatisfaction with colleagues and trainees about whom there may be concern are also provided.

All modules are designed to provide vocational guidance counsellors and vocational trainers with knowledge and understanding relating to the prevalence and potential impacts of appearance dissatisfaction, together with guidance about how these issues might be addressed.

### **Options for Implementing the Modules**

Training can involve all the modules, or a selection of modules. In our experience, each module takes 1-2

hours to deliver, depending on the level of interactivity with the audience. The modules are suitable for delivery in the context of

- A half day course
- A one day training course
- As a programme of self-directed learning

In order to facilitate discussion and small group activities, the suggested number of participants when delivering a course should range from 4 to 24 participants.

## **Guidelines for Trainers Delivering the Materials to Others**

Before delivering the training course:

- 1) Complete the background reading
  - a. Theoretical report
  - b. Relevant National reports
  - c. Synthesis report
- 2) Review the Powerpoint presentations for each module

- 3) Prepare examples relevant to your own experience and to the context of your participants
- 4) Ensure facilities are available to promote interaction & discussion during teaching sessions (see below)
- 5) Develop a teaching plan to include
  - a. warm-up exercise(s)
  - b. an orientation to the content of the module(s)
  - c. time for group discussions & exercises
  - d. a strategy for dealing with sensitive issues should these arise (see below)
- 6) Consider whether the training session would be enhanced through the inclusion of other trainers (for example, those from other relevant professions, eg psychological, sociology, social work)

All materials are available from the project website:

[www.appearancetraining.com](http://www.appearancetraining.com)

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## Teaching facilities

Use facilities conducive to interactive teaching and discussion, for example:

- U-shaped table
- Chairs and tables for small groups (5-6), or round tables for bigger groups
- Flipchart & pens
- Powerpoint projection facilities

### **Dealing with Sensitive Issues during Training**

We do not anticipate that the training will generate high levels of distress among vocational guidance counsellors and trainers in the process of training. But just in case, it is appropriate for those delivering the training to familiarise themselves with sources of suitable forms of additional support should this be necessary (for more detail see the Section relating to 'Dealing with Sensitive Issues' towards the end of this guidance).

## **Guidelines for people using the materials for self - directed learning**

1) Allow 8-10 hours to engage with the materials, as follows:

- a. Preparatory work – 1 hour
- b. Reading the Theoretical Report - 30 mins
- c. Reading the Synthesis report & appropriate National report(s) - 30 mins
- d. Powerpoint Modules - 7-9 hours

2) Preparatory work: Prior to engaging with the materials, reflect on your own experience

- a. How do you feel about your own appearance? In what ways do these feelings influence your professional practice?
- b. Does the appearance of your trainees have an impact on your attitudes and/or behaviour?

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- c. Does the appearance of your trainees and/or the way they feel about it affect their self-perceptions or behavior?
  - d. Does the appearance of your trainees or their feelings or behavior affect their chances of achieving good outcomes from their training (for example, in obtaining employment) ?
  - e. Discuss your thoughts and experiences with your colleagues in relation to their work

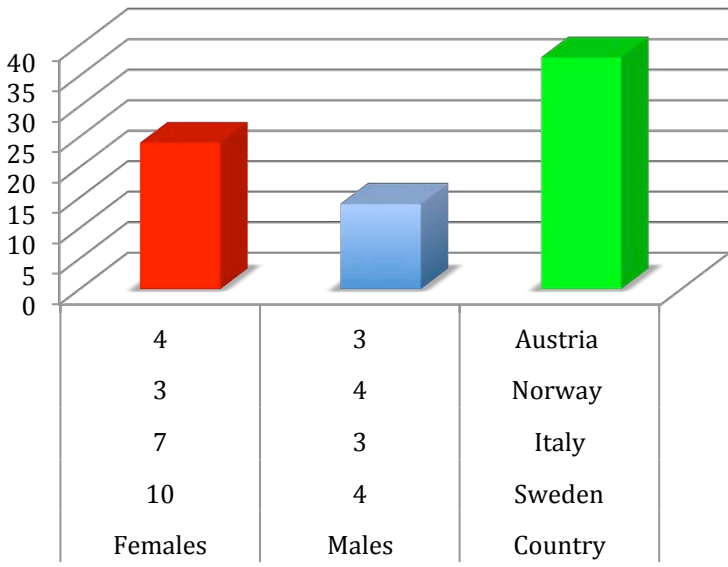
### 3) After completing each module

- a. Consider whether and how you could apply your new knowledge in your practice

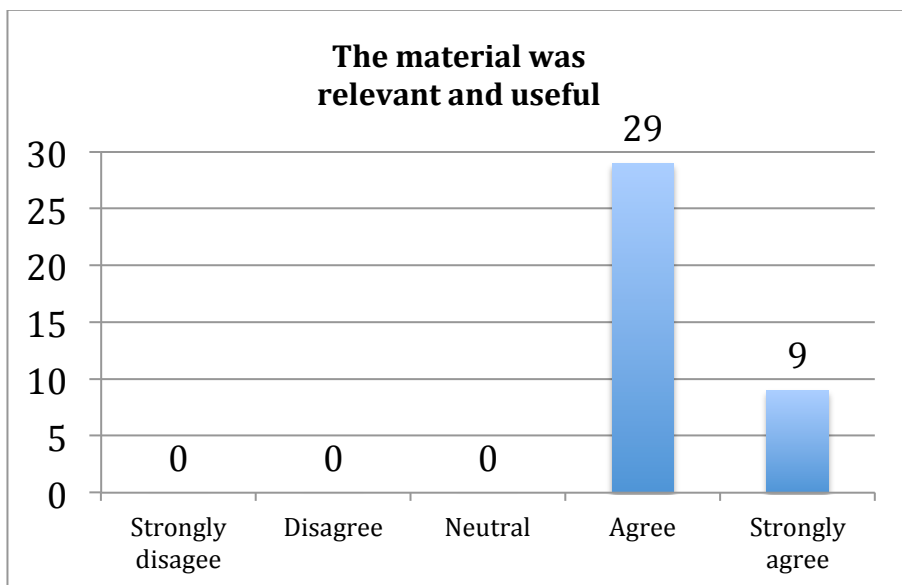
### 4) Reconsider the material again after further experience in practice

# THE RESULTS OF PILOT TESTING

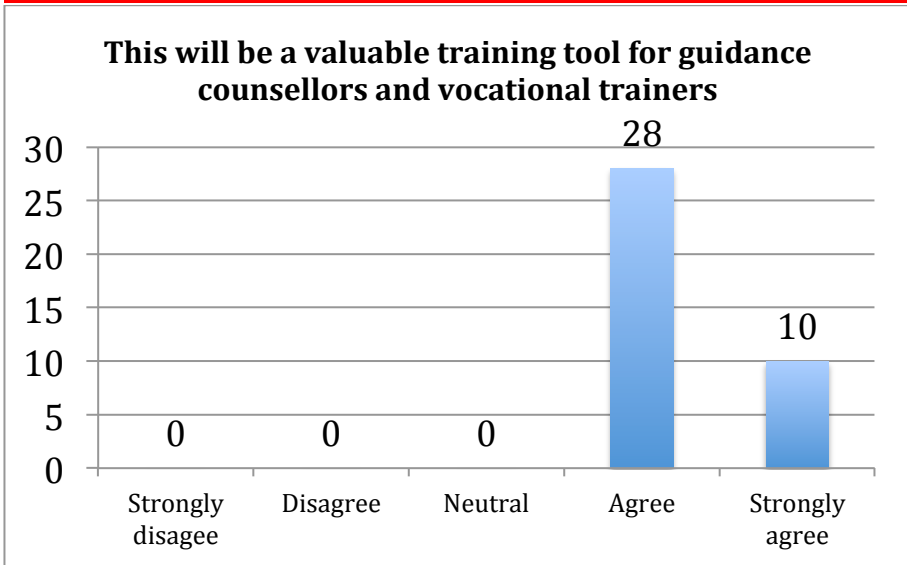
The project partners from Austria, Italy, Norway and Sweden have delivered the training course to guidance counsellors and vocational trainers within their own organisations. Feedback from this pilot study was used to refine the content of the Theoretical Report and the Training Modules. The numbers of participants in the pilot study are shown below:



In total, 38 participants provided data relating to their experiences of receiving this training. Their responses indicated that overall, the training materials were perceived to be both relevant and useful. Participants also considered the training materials would be a valuable training tool for other guidance counsellors and vocational trainers.







A KAP (Knowledge, Attitudes, Practice) test was developed by those delivering the pilot training course in Lithuania. This included questions relating to the learning objectives of the training materials. Participants (who were teachers from a Continuous Studies Institute involved in the development and implementation of postgraduate training courses to different professional groups, together with a few public health specialists involved in training of adults in public health issues) completed the KAP test before and after the course, in

order to assess changes in their knowledge and attitudes and the relevance of the materials to their practice. The number of participants for different modules ranged from 12 to 17.

The KAP test completed after the course indicated that levels of knowledge about appearance and body image had improved amongst all participants, indicating that the modules and other training materials were successful in achieving the planned learning objectives. Participants also completed a general evaluation questionnaire. All participants agreed that their awareness about the potential impacts of appearance dissatisfaction had also increased (75% agree, 25% strongly agree). The background materials (ie the Theoretical, Synthesis & National Reports) were also positively evaluated. All participants agreed (87% agree, 13% strongly agree) that the overall, the training materials comprised a valuable training resource for guidance counsellors and vocational trainers.

## DEALING WITH SENSITIVE ISSUES

### **What to do if appearance dissatisfaction appears to be an issue for a trainee or colleague:**

If you are concerned about one of your trainee's or colleague's level of dissatisfaction with their appearance and feel that this is interfering with their lives to a noticeable degree (see Module 6), you might wish to discuss these concerns with them and/or point them to services which can provide additional information or support. Before doing so, you should

- a) consider how your own feelings, thoughts & behaviours about your own appearance may affect the conversation
- b) familiarise yourself with sources of additional help should these be needed (see Modules 6 & 7, & the section at the end of this guidance)

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- c) consider how you will ensure that any advice you offer is appropriate to your own knowledge and expertise

*[Please note: You should not assume that people with a visible difference (disfigurement) are dissatisfied with the way they look, as this may not be the case. It would only be appropriate to raise this in discussion if they show visible signs of dissatisfaction or distress – see Modules 6 & 7]*

Appearance dissatisfaction can be a sensitive topic and it may be hard for your colleagues or trainees to admit to and/or express concerns. You may become aware of their dissatisfaction by the way they talk about their appearance. For example, they may make frequent negative comments (for example, ‘I’m fat’, ‘I’m ugly’, ‘I look dreadful’). The person may avoid social situations, express an unusual level of anxiety about a job interview, or may make statements expressing belief in the ‘beauty myths’ (for example, ‘I’ll never get a job looking like

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this’, ‘Only attractive people have lots of friends’, ‘The only way I can have a good life is to look more like a supermodel’). Many men find it harder to discuss their feelings and the topic of their appearance than the majority of women.

When raising the topic and discussing any issues the person may have, avoid being judgemental or dismissive of their feelings. Encourage acceptance and appreciation of diversity in appearance in themselves and others and discourage them from comparing themselves (negatively) with their peers. Encourage them to dismiss or challenge appearance-related messages in advertising and the media. Help them to understand that although clothing choices, hairstyle etc may affect the first impressions formed by others, social skills are more powerful in situations such as job interviews and forming friendships. Looking a particular way is not the key to friendships and good relationships and. Let them know you are willing to direct them to additional

information or support if they feel this would be beneficial (see below) and let the person know how they might access these services. The following practical hints and tips may be helpful (please also see Module 7)

*Do....*

- *Provide a 'safe' environment for the conversation (ie somewhere private, where an interruption is unlikely)*
- *Be clear about the boundaries of the conversation from the start (eg inform the person that if the conversation goes beyond your own level of knowledge & skills, you will point them to other sources of help)*
- *Reassure them that some level of concern about appearance is commonplace*
- *Recommend reading and websites for more information (see Module 7 & Resources section below)*

- *Encourage them to focus on developing and using good social skills*
- *Offer them the chance to talk about their concerns to you or, if appropriate, someone with specialist knowledge or skills*

### *Don't....*

- *Suggest they are silly or making a fuss about nothing*
- *Pass judgement on their appearance (eg, saying they 'look fine to you')*
- *Say that lots of other people look 'worse' than they do*

## Sources of Additional Information and Support

“Reflections on Body Image”: Report & Recommendations from the All Party Parliamentary Group Inquiry on Body Image, 2012  
[http://issuu.com/bodyimage/docs/reflections\\_on\\_body\\_image](http://issuu.com/bodyimage/docs/reflections_on_body_image)

General/Family Practitioners may be able to provide a referral to a mental health professional if appropriate.

BEAT provides helplines and online support for those with eating disorders <http://www.b-eat.co.uk/>

Changing Faces is a UK charity that supports and represents people who have disfigurements of the face or body from any cause. Tel: +44 845 4500 275  
Website: <http://www.changingfaces.org.uk>



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Alopecia Patient's Society - Hairline International,

Website: [www.hairlineinternational.com](http://www.hairlineinternational.com)

Offers help, support and advice to people with alopecia and all hair loss conditions.

The Bell's Palsy Network, Website: [www.bellspalsy.net](http://www.bellspalsy.net)

Offers online information, support and advice for those with Bell's palsy and other related conditions.

The Birthmark Support Group, Tel: 0845 045 4700,

Website: [www.birthmarksupportgroup.org.uk](http://www.birthmarksupportgroup.org.uk)

Support group for people with birthmarks.

Breast Cancer Care, Helpline: 0808 800 6000, Website:

[www.breastcancercare.org.uk](http://www.breastcancercare.org.uk)

Offers support, information and advice to those with or recovering from breast cancer.

British Association of Skin Camouflage, Tel: 01226

790744, Website: [www.skin-camouflage.net](http://www.skin-camouflage.net)

Offers training, advice and assistance.

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British Red Cross Skin Camouflage Service, Helpline  
0300012 0276, Website: <http://www.redcross.org.uk/What-we-do/Health-and-social-care/Health-and-social-care-in-the-UK/Skin-camouflage>,  
Email: [skincam@changingfaces.org.uk](mailto:skincam@changingfaces.org.uk)

Cleft Lip & Palate Association (CLAPA), Website:  
[www.clapa.com](http://www.clapa.com)

Provide information, advice and practical support to people with and affected by cleft lip and/or palate in the UK.

Neurofibromatosis Association, Helpline: 020 8439 1234  
(Monday to Friday 9.00 - 17.00),  
Website: [www.nfauk.org](http://www.nfauk.org)

Supports, advises and help people affected by neurofibromatosis.

Psoriasis Association, Helpline: 01604 711129 (Monday to Friday 9.00- 17. 00), Website:

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[www.timewarp.demon.co.uk/psoriasis.html](http://www.timewarp.demon.co.uk/psoriasis.html)

Advice, help and support to people suffering from psoriasis.

Psoriasis Forum, Website: [www.psoriasis-help.org.uk](http://www.psoriasis-help.org.uk)

Interactive forum offering support groups to people suffering from psoriasis.

Psoriasis and Psoriatic Arthritis Alliance (PAPAA),

Website: [WwW.papaa.org](http://WwW.papaa.org)

UK registered charity dedicated to helping people affected by psoriasis and psoriatic arthritis.

Vitiligo Society, Helpline: 020 7840 0855 (Monday to Friday 10.00- 17.00), Website: [www.vitiligosociety.org.uk](http://www.vitiligosociety.org.uk)

[vitiligosociety.org.uk](http://www.vitiligosociety.org.uk)

Information, help and support for people with vitiligo.

## PARTNERS



ASEV - Agenzia per lo Sviluppo  
Empolese Valdelsa  
[www.asev.it](http://www.asev.it)

BEST Institut für berufsbezogene  
Weiterbildung und  
Personaltraining GmbH  
[www.best.at](http://www.best.at)



Folkuniversitetet  
Kristianstad  
[www.folkuniversitetet.se](http://www.folkuniversitetet.se)



Klaipeda University Continuing  
Studies Institute  
[www.ku.lt/en/](http://www.ku.lt/en/)



Rogaland School- and business  
Development Foundation  
[rogalandsbdf.com](http://rogalandsbdf.com)

Centre for Appearance Research  
University West of Engand  
[www.uwe.ac.uk](http://www.uwe.ac.uk)



University of the  
West of England

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