



**European Cooperation  
in the field of Scientific  
and Technical Research  
- COST -**

**Brussels, 21 November 2012**

**IS1210**

## **MEMORANDUM OF UNDERSTANDING**

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Subject :           Memorandum of Understanding for the implementation of a European Concerted Research Action designated as COST Action IS1210 : Appearance Matters: Tackling the Physical and Psychosocial Consequences of Dissatisfaction with Appearance

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Delegations will find attached the Memorandum of Understanding for COST Action as approved by the COST Committee of Senior Officials (CSO) at its 186th meeting on 20 - 21 November 2012.

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**MEMORANDUM OF UNDERSTANDING**  
**For the implementation of a European Concerted Research Action designated as**  
**COST Action IS1210**  
**APPEARANCE MATTERS: TACKLING THE PHYSICAL AND PSYCHOSOCIAL**  
**CONSEQUENCES OF DISSATISFACTION WITH APPEARANCE.**

The Parties to this Memorandum of Understanding, declaring their common intention to participate in the concerted Action referred to above and described in the technical Annex to the Memorandum, have reached the following understanding:

1. The Action will be carried out in accordance with the provisions of document COST 4154/11 “Rules and Procedures for Implementing COST Actions”, or in any new document amending or replacing it, the contents of which the Parties are fully aware of.
2. The main objective of the Action is to co-ordinate and increase the capacity for research focussing on the prevalence of appearance-related distress in COST countries, the negative impacts in key areas of living, and the efficacy of interventions to ameliorate distress.
3. The economic dimension of the activities carried out under the Action has been estimated, on the basis of information available during the planning of the Action, at EUR 76 million in 2012 prices.
4. The Memorandum of Understanding will take effect on being accepted by at least five Parties.
5. The Memorandum of Understanding will remain in force for a period of 4 years, calculated from the date of the first meeting of the Management Committee, unless the duration of the Action is modified according to the provisions of Chapter V of the document referred to in Point 1 above.

## **A. ABSTRACT AND KEYWORDS**

Until recently, societal interest in ‘looks’ has been considered largely benign, however, debilitating levels of appearance dissatisfaction are now normative in resource-rich nations, with extensive and damaging impacts on physical and psychological health. Although there are examples of research and activism in this field in Europe, many researchers work in isolation, diluting the potential impact of their work. Europe currently lacks a harmonised approach to establishing levels of appearance-related distress, the impacts on key areas of living and to the systematic evaluation of interventions currently being implemented within and beyond Europe. This Action will co-ordinate and increase research across Europe, offer support to the high proportion of female and early career researchers in this field and will forge crucial links between researchers, practitioners and policy makers, offering the potential for significant benefits to the millions of Europeans adversely affected by these issues.

**A.2 Keywords:** Appearance dissatisfaction, body image, disfigurement, risks to physical and psychological health

## **B. BACKGROUND**

### **B.1 General background**

In a recent study, 1 in 3 of a sample of 950 adults reported that they would trade at least a year of their life if it meant they could achieve their ideal body weight and shape (Diedrichs et al, 2011a), and in a survey of 5,000 adults, 29% of women reported that they “constantly worry about their body – every waking minute” (<http://news.bbc.co.uk/1/hi/health/4898484.stm>). Research indicates that 70% of adolescent girls and 50% of boys want to change their body shape (Diedrichs & Paraskeva, 2011; Ousley, Cordero, & White, 2008). In a study of 77,000 UK adults, 60% reported feeling ashamed of how they look, and 73% felt pressure from the media to have a perfect body (Diedrichs, 2011b).

Until recently, societal interest in “looks” has been considered largely benign, however, debilitating levels of appearance dissatisfaction are now normative in developed nations. Appearance dissatisfaction does not discriminate on the basis of age, gender or ethnicity. Research documents the widespread prevalence of appearance concerns among children and young-, mid- and older-

adults, among women and men, and across a range of ethnic groups and cultures (Rumsey & Harcourt, 2012). Experts consider this to be an ‘epidemic’ – one which is causing significant concern among researchers, educationalists, paediatricians and governments. Although the bulk of research has been carried out in the US, Australia and the UK, early indicators are that women in Eastern and Western Europe also have relatively high levels of body dissatisfaction only marginally less than those reported in North and South America (Swami et al, 2009).

Governments, politicians and policy makers worldwide have recently expressed the need for greater attention and coordination of research and for strategies to reduce appearance dissatisfaction. The British All Party Parliamentary Group on Body Image recently led a public inquiry into the causes and consequences of appearance dissatisfaction. The inquiry concluded that levels have never been higher in the UK and issued a call to action to Government, policy makers, researchers, health professionals and industry (APPG, 2012). Similarly, governments in Italy, Spain, Brazil, Argentina, Australia, Canada and France have developed charters which attempt to promote greater acceptance of diversity in appearance and to reduce appearance dissatisfaction among the millions of people affected. To date, these government and policy initiatives have had limited impact and there is an ever-growing need for a more coordinated, interdisciplinary approach to tackling appearance dissatisfaction in Europe and worldwide.

## **B.2 Current state of knowledge**

Research evidence now charts the extensive and damaging impacts of dissatisfaction with appearance on physical and psychological health across the lifespan. The negative consequences cut across all key areas of living, including health, social relationships, education and vocational functioning.

### **EFFECTS ON PSYCHOLOGICAL HEALTH & WELLBEING:**

The mental health of young people is a major cause of concern in Europe (OECD 2010). In recent large scale studies, negative body image was cited as a principal component and predictor of lowered self-esteem, emotional distress and depression (Stice, 2002). Appearance is the leading cause of concern for young people in developed countries (e.g. Mission Australia, 2012) and has become central to the self-definition of most women and growing numbers of men.

### **EFFECTS ON PHYSICAL HEALTH:**

There are now well established links between appearance concerns and several health-

compromising behaviours, including drug and alcohol misuse (Kanayama, 2006), the avoidance or over-indulgence in exercise and the use of steroids to increase muscle bulk in males (Harper & Tiggeman, 2008). Teenagers with body disturbance are significantly more likely to initiate smoking (Stice and Shaw, 2003) and to use smoking as an appetite suppressant (Arnos & Bostock, 2007). Furthermore, studies have revealed that those with high levels of negative affect and appearance dissatisfaction were more likely to engage in self harm (Muehlenhamp & Brausch, 2012). Appearance dissatisfaction predicted an earlier initial age of first sexual intercourse in a study of Norwegian girls (Kvalem, et al, 2011).

The rising incidence of diagnosable eating disorders has been recognised, but is only the tip of an iceberg of disordered eating resulting from appearance dissatisfaction. Rates of fasting, skipping meals, self induced vomiting and the use of laxatives, diuretics and diet pills are increasing (Field et al, 2005), particularly amongst adolescents with higher levels of appearance dissatisfaction (VanderWell, 2011).

Increasing numbers are undergoing cosmetic procedures (with concomitant health risks) as a fix for dissatisfaction with appearance, low self-esteem and low social confidence. Psychological gains are short term at best, with many dissatisfied as procedures fail to achieve their often unrealistic expectations (Sarwer, 2011).

#### EFFECTS IN EDUCATIONAL & VOCATIONAL CONTEXTS:

Restrictive eating is associated with a range of detrimental cognitive effects, including decreased attention-span and memory. Students with lower grades are more likely to report that body image concerns interfered with their academic performance (Yanover & Thompson, 2008). Lovegrove (2002) found that 31% of UK teenagers avoid classroom debate and 20% absent themselves from school when lacking confidence about their appearance.

#### SOCIALLY MARGINALISED GROUPS:

Following race, gender, and age-based discrimination, weight bias is the fourth most common form of discrimination in many developed countries (Puhl et al, 2008). The rising numbers who are overweight and stigmatised are more likely to experience negative body image, depressed mood and poor self esteem (Keery et al 2005). Being a victim of weight bias can impact negatively on physical health by placing individuals at increased risk for disordered eating and resistance to physical activity (Vartanian & Shaprow, 2008). Furthermore, overweight and obese individuals often delay seeking healthcare due to concerns about experiencing weight bias from health professionals (Amy et al, 2006).

One in five people have a condition resulting in a difference in appearance which is visible to others (disfigurement), for example, from congenital defects, disease (skin conditions; arthritis), trauma (e.g. burns), or medical treatment (e.g., the excision of malignant tumours). For many, this ‘difference’ negatively impacts self-esteem and social functioning. The fear of appearance changes can affect treatment decision-making (e.g. the uptake of chemotherapy in patients concerned about hair loss) and adherence to medication (e.g. failing to take immuno-suppressive medication following organ transplantation in order to avoid excessive facial hair and bloating).

Appearance issues can be particularly challenging for migrants and others from socially disadvantaged groups and may contribute to social exclusion. Girls from lower performing schools place more importance on being attractive compared with girls from higher performing schools. In addition, unprecedented levels of debt are incurred amongst lower socioeconomic groups in order to undergo cosmetic surgery (Crandall et al, 2012).

Risk factors for appearance dissatisfaction include a combination of individual and socio-cultural factors. Pressure from the media and from peers is experienced to a greater extent by those who are psychologically vulnerable. However, as debilitating levels of appearance dissatisfaction spread and become ever more ‘normative’, fewer and fewer people are at ease with their appearance. Even those who are resilient to media messages have a grumbling sense of dissatisfaction with their looks and experience mounting pressure to take measures to change their appearance (Rumsey & Harcourt, 2011).

Currently there are pockets of research into appearance dissatisfaction in the United Kingdom, Spain, France, Belgium, Luxembourg, Italy and Sweden. However, researchers from European countries report that with limited resources and opportunities for face-to-face meetings and networking, dissemination of their findings and inter-country research and collaboration is impossible. Thus, it is difficult to establish consistency within research and to share effective strategies to ameliorate appearance concerns across Europe. Additionally, there has been very little research into appearance dissatisfaction in Eastern European countries.

### **B.3 Reasons for the Action**

Although there are examples of research and activism in this field in Europe, many researchers work in isolation and lack support, diluting the potential impact of their work. A COST network would provide the opportunity to increase, co-ordinate and harmonise research in this field across Europe, increase scientific understanding and awareness in researchers, practitioners and policy makers about the impact of appearance dissatisfaction in priority areas of psychological and

physical health, and of the potential for interventions to address need.

Appearance research spans many disciplines including psychology, sociology, public health, education, vocational training, several specialties within medicine. To achieve the change necessary, the commitment of practitioners and policy makers is necessary. COST is an appropriate mechanism for this Action as it promotes collaborative activities within and across disciplines and facilitates engagement with non-academic partners. In addition, the high proportion of early career and female researchers in this field would derive considerable benefit from the establishment of a supportive COST network, offering mentoring from established researchers, scientific exchanges and the opportunity to develop collaborative protocols for research.

#### **B.4 Complementarity with other research programmes**

The proposed Action will complement, but not duplicate European research programmes focussing on health promotion in schools and universities ([www.schoolsforhealth.eu](http://www.schoolsforhealth.eu) ; [www.healthyuniversities.ac.uk](http://www.healthyuniversities.ac.uk)), as these do not focus on the impacts of appearance dissatisfaction on psychological and physical health.

### **C. OBJECTIVES AND BENEFITS**

#### **C.1 Aim**

The aim of this Action is to increase, co-ordinate and harmonise European research in the field of appearance-related dissatisfaction. The Action will progressively construct a multidisciplinary community of researchers and practitioners which will develop comprehensive resources to support collaborative pan-European research to (a) determine the extent and impacts of appearance-related distress on key areas of living, (b) evaluate the effectiveness of interventions and (c) promote social activism to produce changes in policy and practice.

#### **C.2 Objectives**

This COST Action will:

1. Increase and coordinate research across Europe through the initial establishment and progressive growth of an interdisciplinary research network (to be assessed by the numbers joining the Action, attending training schools and conferences)

2. Increase scientific understanding across Europe of the prevalence and impact of appearance dissatisfaction in priority areas of mental and physical health, and of techniques to prevent or ameliorate distress, through the (a) sharing of expertise amongst existing members of the Action (b) invitations to experts from non-COST countries to address Action members (c) facilitation of research through a series of training schools & workshops (d) development of resources (in the form of ‘toolkit’ hosted on a purpose-designed website) to support research, including briefing papers, literature reviews of the evidence base, key references, recommended measures, research protocols and resources to facilitate the implementation and evaluation of interventions
3. Promote the sustainability of the network beyond the life of the Action by (a) developing an agreed agenda for pan-European, collaborative research (b) achieving consensus on core measures and protocols to underpin collaborative research (c) developing an international database for managing data associated with collaborative projects (d) identifying potential funding sources and developing collaborative funding applications
4. Offer support to the high proportion of female and early career researchers in this field through a programme of mentorship, Short Term Scientific Missions and Training Schools
5. Promote awareness of the impacts of appearance dissatisfaction and the potential for intervention amongst key stakeholders and policy makers through (a) training workshops in social activism open to members of the Action and others (b) an interim Conference (year 2) and final Summit (year 4) for all relevant parties

Progress towards each Objective will be assessed in concrete terms at each Management Committee during the life of the Action.

### **C.3 How networking within the Action will yield the objectives?**

The establishment of a COST network will permit the creation of an environment in which knowledge and expertise can be shared and scientific understanding increased (Objective 2). This network will facilitate the coordination and progressive expansion of research activity through the

work of four Working Groups (WG1-4), convened to focus on the development of research in the key areas of education, vocational training, public health and in medical settings and a fifth (WG5) sharing and further developing expertise in the crucial area of engaging key stakeholders and effecting changes to policy and practice (Objective 1). Each WG will comprise researchers and practitioners from different COST countries and professional backgrounds, and will include both experienced and early career researchers. Objectives 1 & 2 will also be achieved during the life of the Action through plenary meetings for all WG members, 4 Training Schools run by experts from non-COST countries by an interim conference (Year 2) and final Summit (Year 4).

The sustainability of the network beyond the life of the Action (Objective 3) will be promoted through the development of a consensus agenda for pan European research, through the development of a 'toolkit' of resources to underpin collaborative research, through the establishment of agreed research protocols and a database to capture data using these, through the establishment of research partnerships and the preparation of collaborative bids, both within and between Working Groups. The resources developed by the network will be hosted on a purpose designed website, and will be available beyond the life of the Action.

The network will offer support to Early Career Researchers (ECRs) and to female researchers (Objective 4) through a programme of mentorship, in which more experienced researchers within the Action will mentor ECRs, female (and if appropriate, male) researchers who identify as feeling unsupported in their work. In addition, a programme of short term scientific missions (STSMs), will be hosted in centres of excellence. Less experienced researchers and practitioners will also derive considerable benefit from the broader activities offered by a COST network, such as participating in WG activities, Training Schools and conferences, accessing visiting international experts from non-COST countries and from the opportunity to develop collaborative protocols and partnerships.

The final objective – to promote awareness in key stakeholders and policy makers of the impacts of appearance dissatisfaction and of the potential for interventions (Objective 5) will be achieved through the activities of WG5 (Social Activism, Society & Culture). Increased knowledge and an increased confidence in effective methods of engaging key stakeholders will facilitate Action members to promote and contribute to enduring changes to policy and practice. In addition, Training Schools, the interim conference and final Summit will be advertised via the national networks of Action members to encourage key stakeholders, policy makers and additional researchers to attend, and if appropriate, to join the Action (Objective 1).

#### **C.4 Potential impact of the Action**

This Action has the potential to contribute to significant benefits for the millions of Europeans adversely affected by appearance dissatisfaction. Advances in understanding through an increased capacity for research and a greater awareness amongst key professionals and policy makers in health, education and vocational training of the impacts of appearance dissatisfaction and the potential for intervention have the potential to create SOCIAL IMPACT through the development, implementation and evaluation of appropriate interventions and by promoting a European culture in which diversity in appearance is accepted and valued. ECONOMIC BENEFIT will accrue through substantial cost savings in relation to improvements in mental health, educational and vocational functioning and reductions in health risk behaviours. SCIENTIFIC BENEFIT will result from the increase in volume, quality and potential impact of research and through the presentation, publication and dissemination of research findings, and through invitations to non-COST international experts to address members of the COST Action. Researchers and practitioners will increase their KNOWLEDGE AND SKILLS through participation in Training Schools and attendance at conferences, increasing their appreciation of the advantages of evidence based practice, and greater knowledge of the impact of appearance dissatisfaction.

#### **C.5 Target groups/end users**

Target Groups for the Action will include researchers from the disciplines of health, social and clinical psychology, sociology, education, vocational training, public health, medicine, media & the fashion industry; practitioners from education, vocational training, public health and medicine; professionals from industries allied to media and fashion and policy makers (European level, National government level, sector level). Particular attention will be paid to the recruitment of Action members from less developed COST countries.

End Users will comprise school children, teachers, university students, school and university counsellors, vocational trainers and trainees, health care professionals and patients with conditions or treatment affecting appearance.

Representatives from the research and practitioner communities, policy makers at sector and European levels, and members of the public affected by appearance-related distress resulting from body dissatisfaction and disfigurement have been consulted in the development of this Action. All representatives are willing to be involved in the Action on an on-going basis.

## **D. SCIENTIFIC PROGRAMME**

### **D.1 Scientific focus**

This Action will have four main scientific foci.

1. The Action will focus on increasing levels of scientific knowledge and understanding in this field by initiating a knowledge accumulation strategy in which current theoretical perspectives, research findings and evidence-based techniques for interventions are shared across Action partners through the activities of the Working Groups, the plenary meetings of Working Groups, the Training Schools (Years 1, 2, 3), workshops, the kick-off conference, an interim conference (Year 2) and final Summit (Year 4), STSMs and a mentorship scheme.

2. The Action will harmonise and systematise existing and future research by developing pan-European research protocols to address key research questions:

- a) What is the extent, nature and impact of appearance dissatisfaction in young people and adults in member countries?
- b) What are the similarities and differences between countries and within population subgroups?
- c) Are existing interventions relevant and effective? What cultural and setting specific adaptations are necessary?

To support this work, the activities of the Working Groups will result in a ‘toolkit’ of resources to underpin research carried out by Action members, and interested parties beyond the network. This toolkit will include

- a) Authoritative reviews of the literature relating to research on the prevalence and impacts of appearance dissatisfaction, and the evidence base relating to interventions designed to prevent or ameliorate these impacts, in the contexts of education, vocational training, public health & health care
- b) Research protocols and measures, agreed by members of the Action as appropriate for assessing the prevalence and impacts of appearance dissatisfaction
- c) Details of a common database designed to capture data collected using agreed protocols and measures
- d) Potential sources of funding for research
- e) Recommended interventions to reduce or prevent the impacts of appearance dissatisfaction, and measures to evaluate the effectiveness of interventions
- f) Training materials for educators, vocational trainers, counsellors and health care professionals to support their efforts to deliver effective interventions

- g) Hints and tips for practitioners working with people affected by appearance dissatisfaction
- h) Information to support efforts of researchers and practitioners to raise awareness and to engage key stakeholders and policy makers in operationalizing the results of research in this field

3. The Action will maintain a focus on developing a network and infrastructure for high quality, collaborative pan-European research beyond the life of the Action. Through conferences, Working Groups, regular plenary sessions, STSMs and a mentorship scheme, the Action will facilitate the development of multi-professional research collaborations. Existing networks of the Action members will be tapped to identify potential funding sources. Working Groups will be used as a medium to develop funding applications for programmes of research in which findings can be compared between countries and regions in Europe, and also compared with findings from other non-COST countries. Experts from non-COST countries will be encouraged to attend the Action interim conference and final Summit, and to contribute to Training Schools and Workshops. This will facilitate linkages between the burgeoning research collaborations and existing experts worldwide.

4. The Action will increase scientific knowledge and understanding amongst network members about effective ways to influence change to policy and practice in relation to meeting the needs of people whose lives are negatively impacted by appearance dissatisfaction. The importance of this task is reflected in the dedication of one Working Group (WG5) to this task for the duration of the Action. Members of this group will share expertise in the field, assess the evidence base for techniques of engagement and social activism, prepare resources to support the efforts of others and by integrating their work into the activities of other Working Groups.

## **D.2 Scientific work plan methods and means**

Five Working Groups will be the main vehicles of delivering the Scientific Work Plan. Their activities will focus on research in different settings covering key areas of daily living, as follows:

**WG1 Educational settings.** This group will focus on harmonising and promoting research in educational settings including compulsory school and higher education. The scope will include research on the prevalence and impacts of appearance dissatisfaction in educational contexts, on the efficacy of interventions to ameliorate or prevent impacts, and on the training needs of teachers and other educationalists.

**WG2 Vocational training settings.** This group will focus on the collation and promotion of

research relevant to the prevalence and impacts of appearance dissatisfaction on vocational training outcomes, on methods of raising the awareness of vocational trainers and counsellors of these negative impacts, and of developing, implementing and evaluating interventions to optimise outcomes.

**WG3 Public health.** The focus of this group will be to collate the results of existing research and lay the foundations for future research on the physical and psychological impacts of appearance dissatisfaction. Expertise will be shared within the group in relation to how these topics might be addressed within public health settings.

**WG4 Health care settings.** This group will gather examples of existing research on the prevalence and impacts of appearance dissatisfaction (amongst those with disfiguring conditions, and more broadly, in the wider population) in the health care context, including the motivation to seek treatment (e.g. cosmetic surgery), adherence to medication and satisfaction with the care received. The group will develop resources to underpin future collaborative research and consider ways of raising awareness in health care providers and policy makers of these issues.

**WG5 will address Social and Cultural issues** relating to appearance dissatisfaction, including the impact of globalisation, the influence of the media and fashion industries, differences in the prevalence and impacts of appearance dissatisfaction between countries and regions in Europe, and the particular pressures experienced by people from socially marginalised and disadvantaged groups. This WG will focus on best practice techniques and the evidence base relating to methods of raising awareness of the extent and impacts of appearance dissatisfaction in policy-makers and practitioners.

The activities of the Working Groups will develop in parallel through the course of the Action, co-ordinated by the Management Committee. Working Groups 1-4 will address the following cross-cutting themes and activities;

- a) Review current research activity and evidence relating to the prevalence and impact of appearance-related distress
- b) Develop common methods of establishing the prevalence of appearance dissatisfaction in the various settings in member countries
- c) Develop common methods of determining the impacts of appearance concerns on physical & psychological health in member countries
- d) Assess the evidence for the effectiveness of current interventions in each setting
- e) Consider the particular needs of minority and socially marginalised groups
- f) Extend the Action to other researchers & practitioners during the life of the Action
- g) Build relationships & partnerships to facilitate research during and beyond the life of the Action

- h) Identify key stakeholders and experts and raise their awareness of the extent and impact of appearance dissatisfaction
- i) Identify potential sources of funding & develop funding bids to underpin future research activities

WG 5 (Society, Culture and Social Activism) will maintain a particular focus on activities e)-

h) This WG will focus on coordinating current and future research on societal and cultural influences on appearance dissatisfaction, including the impact of globalisation and of the media and fashion industries. Members will consider evidence relating to the effectiveness of techniques designed to produce changes in policy and practice, and will develop resources to facilitate the engagement of key stakeholders and policy makers across all settings. These will be shared with WGs in plenary sessions throughout the Action and in specialist workshops delivered by members of WG5 to all other WGs at the beginning of Year 4.

Working Group meetings will be scheduled in parallel, and will be followed by a half-day plenary meeting for all members of the Action, to ensure cross-fertilisation between those from different professional disciplines and settings, and to facilitate cross-disciplinary collaborations.

The kick-off conference, interim conference, final Summit and all activities of the Working Groups will contribute to accumulation of knowledge and expertise amongst members of the Action during the life of the programme. In addition, the Management Committee will organise a series of four Training Schools designed to underpin the activities of the WGs. These will be open to all members of the Action and additional delegates recruited through the national and professional contacts of members of the Action, as follows:

Training School 1: Identifying key measures for collaborative research (Year 1)

Training School 2: Interventions to prevent or ameliorate appearance dissatisfaction: Examining the evidence (Year 2)

Training School 3: Assessing appearance dissatisfaction in marginalised and socially disadvantaged groups (Year 3)

Training School 4: Engaging key stakeholders: Social activism to influence policy and practice (Year 4)

A series of shorter specialist workshops in which visiting experts and/or experienced Action members will lead others in increasing their knowledge and skill in relation to relevant aspects of theory, methodology, measurement, intervention delivery or evaluation will also be organised, with a programme spanning the life of the Action. The final schedule will be determined by the Management Committee, taking into account the needs and preferences of Action members.

Short Term Scientific Missions: A programme of STSMs will be developed to enable early career researchers and practitioners to visit established research groups, research-active practitioners and successful social activists. These visits will last from 1 week to 3 months, and will actively involve the successful applicants in the activities of the centres visited, under the guidance of a nominated mentor. It is envisaged that four STSMs will take place in each year of the Action. These, together with a broader programme of mentorship (to be conducted by email, and through face-to-face meetings during events relating to the Action) for researchers in the field who consider their support to be less than optimum, will facilitate an increased capacity for research in this field in COST countries, and to the establishment of sustainable networks between existing researchers.

All members of the Working Groups (and the broader Action) will be encouraged to share their local knowledge and experience, whatever their level of engagement in this field prior to the Action. The activities of the Working Groups will be designed to produce resources to underpin current and future research. These will be shared and discussed during plenary sessions, and coordinated by the Management Committee to result in a research ‘toolkit’ to be hosted on the Action website. These resources will be accessible to those outside of the Action on dedicated webpages.

## **E. ORGANISATION**

### **E.1 Coordination and organisation**

This Action will be organised according to “Rules and Procedures for Implementing Cost Actions” 4154/11.

The Action will be driven and coordinated by a Management Committee (MC), comprising an elected Chair and Vice-Chair, up to two representatives from each COST country (one of whom will be designated ‘National Lead’). The MC will meet every 6 months. The MC will be responsible for co-ordinating the activities of the WGs, budget planning and the allocation of funds, organising Training Schools & conferences, developing and overseeing programmes for mentoring and STSMs and cascading information from the Action through national and international networks. The MC will monitor the election of members and Chairs to Working Groups; progress in relation to the scientific focus and workplan; the achievement of all milestones, the staging of Training Schools, programmes for mentoring and STSMs (Year 1), the staging of an interim conference (Year 2), completion of the Action research ‘toolkit’ and other Action deliverables (Year 3 & 4), the launch of the Action website (Year 2) and staging of the final Summit (Year 4). A Core Group (CG) will comprise the Chair and Vice-Chair of the MC, and the Chair and Vice-Chairs of the 5 Working Groups. The CG will meet every 3 months, either face-to-face, or by

video-conference. The CG will be responsible for preparing annual reports of the work of the Action, assembling the Action research ‘toolkit’, overseeing the development and maintenance of the Action website, communicating with the COST office and monitoring COST procedures. The Action’s website will serve as a central information and dissemination point, during the life of the Action and beyond. The website will include an Action calendar and programme, information relating to the Action’s mentoring scheme and programme for STSMs. Over the course of the Action, the website will be populated with resources to facilitate collaborative research (see above). It will act as an intranet to exchange information amongst participants and an extranet to promote the Action to the wider public.

Members of the Action will meet face to face at 6 monthly intervals during the life of the Action. Following the meeting of the MC, the WGs will convene in parallel sessions. All members of the Action will then meet for a plenary session. Training Schools will either precede or follow WG/plenary meetings to minimise travel costs.

## **E.2 Working Groups**

The bulk of the work of the Action will be operationalized through 5 thematic WGs which will address the cross-cutting themes outlined in Section D.2 above, in the particular settings in which appearance dissatisfaction has been demonstrated to result in negative impacts, as follows  
WG1 Educational settings; WG2 Vocational settings; WG3 Public health settings; WG4 health care settings, with WG5 addressing social and cultural issues. Each WG will produce an annual report of activity, which will be co-ordinated and summarised by the MC, and made publicly available on the Action website.

## **E.3 Liaison and interaction with other research programmes**

As the result of its interdisciplinary nature, this Action has the potential to build working links with other research programmes in the fields of education, vocational training, psychology, public health and health care/medicine, involving both COST and non-COST countries, e.g. SHE ([www.schoolsforhealth.eu](http://www.schoolsforhealth.eu)) and SPIN: New Directions for Patient-Centred Care in Scleroderma: the Scleroderma Patient-Centred Intervention Network; Leonardo Da Vinci programme ‘Appearance Matters’ – optimising the outcomes for vocational counselling and vocational training’ 527463-LLP-2012-UK-LEONARDO-LMP.

#### E.4 Gender balance and involvement of early-stage researchers

Several ECRs have been involved in the preparation of this application, and the gender balance is well represented among the proposed participants. The MC will also encourage more experienced researchers and practitioners to increase their skill base by attending Training Schools and scientific exchanges. The MC will ensure that the Chairs and Vice-Chairs of the WGs represent a wide spread of European countries, and that early career and female researchers share fully in the allocation of responsibilities and activities within these groups.

#### F. TIMETABLE

	Year 1		Year 2	
	1 <sup>st</sup> Semester	2 <sup>nd</sup> Semester	1 <sup>st</sup> Semester	2 <sup>nd</sup> Semester
MC/CG meetings	MC	MC/CG	MC/CG	MC/CG
WG Meetings		1 <sup>st</sup> WG Meeting	2 <sup>nd</sup> WG Meeting	3 <sup>rd</sup> WG Meeting
STSM	1 STSM	3 STSM	3 STSM	3 STSM
Work shop		1 <sup>st</sup> workshop		
Training schools		1 <sup>st</sup> Training school		2 <sup>nd</sup> Training school
Conference				1 <sup>st</sup> Conference

	Year 3		Year 4	
	1 <sup>st</sup> Semester	2 <sup>nd</sup> Semester	1 <sup>st</sup> Semester	2 <sup>nd</sup> Semester
MC/CG meetings	MC/CG	MC/CG	MC/CG	MC
WG Meetings	4 <sup>th</sup> WG Meeting	5 <sup>th</sup> WG Meeting	6 <sup>th</sup> WG Meeting	
STSM	3 STSM	3 STSM	3 STSM	1 STSM
Workshop		2 <sup>nd</sup> Workshop		
Training schools		3 <sup>rd</sup> Training school		4 <sup>th</sup> Training school
Conference				2 <sup>nd</sup> Conference

## **G. ECONOMIC DIMENSION**

The following COST countries have actively participated in the preparation of the Action or otherwise indicated their interest: AT, BA, CH, DE, DK, EE, ES, FI, FR, IE, IT, LT, NL, NO, PT, RO, SE, SK, UK. On the basis of national estimates, the economic dimension of the activities to be carried out under the Action has been estimated at 76 Million € for the total duration of the Action. This estimate is valid under the assumption that all the countries mentioned above but no other countries will participate in the Action. Any departure from this will change the total cost accordingly.

## **H. DISSEMINATION PLAN**

### **H.1 Who?**

The target groups for the focus of dissemination include researchers from the fields of health, social & clinical sociology, education, public health, medicine, genetics and media; practitioners from the fields of education, vocational training, public health & health care professionals; journalists, professionals from the media and fashion industries; European level and national government policy makers; sector policy makers; NGOs and Patient & Public Involvement groups (PPIs); interested members of the general public.

### **H.2 What?**

Online dissemination methods will include

- a) A dedicated Action website. The outward-facing section of this website will detail the current and upcoming events and activities, key research papers and training materials (e.g. intervention toolkits) and will be available to all internet users around the world.
- b) Social media including LinkedIn, Facebook and Twitter accounts will be set-up and monitored by WG Leads in order to disseminate updates to members of the Action and other stakeholders including journalists (who use social media key sources of information).
- c) Specialised and draft materials will be posted on password protected pages of the Action-specific website to be accessed only by members of the Action.

Papers, reports and media activities will include:

- a) Papers and state of the art reports will be prepared throughout the duration of the Action by its

members and submitted to journals in the fields of education, public health and health psychology in order to gain a broad academic audience for these materials

- b) The Working Group on social activism will lead on the dissemination of relevant aspects of the Action to the general public, policy makers and Governments. It will also stimulate debate amongst policy makers and the general public through press releases, documents and discussion points hosted on the website regarding issues pertinent to the activities of the Action
- c) Press releases relating to the activities within the Action will be prepared by members of the MC, CG & WGs
- d) A final Action toolkit which will include key references, consensus methodologies and measures for research and evaluation and resources to underpin interventions

Conferences and Meetings will include:

- a) The initial (kick-off) and interim conference (end of year 2) will target researchers, practitioners and other professionals who might be interested in joining the Action by circulating emails of invitation.
- b) A pan-European, multi-disciplinary Summit will be held at the end of the Action (end of year 4) in order to disseminate the final findings across all working groups and to key stakeholders.
- c) Members of the COST Action will also submit papers, workshops and symposia to other independent conferences in the fields of public health, health psychology, education and health care in order to gain a broader audience for the findings and outcomes of the Action.
- d) Training schools on research and evaluation methodologies, outcome measures and intervention techniques will be conducted for audiences of researchers and practitioners interested in developing their skill sets.

### **H.3 How?**

How will these dissemination methods be used?

- a) The Action website will provide the main dissemination platform, as it will be used to store all of the outputs and resources generated as a part of the COST Action. These will include summaries of the conferences, annual reports, resources to support current and future collaborations
- b) Social media (Facebook, Twitter, LinkedIN) and email will be used to distribute information, alert professionals to new content on the website, and generate discussion between workshops and meetings.
- c) The Training Schools, interim conference and final Summit will be open to all interested parties,

and will be widely advertised using the existing networks of Action participants, and through press releases circulated to journalists across Europe.

d) Each Action participant will undertake to engage in dissemination activities within their own region and professional setting. These activities (for example, lectures, workshops, science cafes) will be supported by resources formulated by the WGs, included in the Action's 'toolkit', and hosted on the Action's website.

The dissemination activities in this Action will be regularly monitored by the MC and the dissemination strategy updated as necessary.