

# Structural Change Needs Allies

Practical Guide to Cooperation  
and Shaping the Future



QUEE

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# Dear readers

**The region of Lusatia [German: *Lausitz*] is and remains an important lifeline for energy provision in our country. Despite this, companies and their employees here are faced with significant challenges, which include digitisation, decarbonisation and demographic change. At the same time, we are dealing with growing scepticism towards democracy in parts of our society. Moreover, the development of the global economy is not without risk.**

If we want to tackle these developments with vigour whilst maintaining economic stability and a commitment to social responsibility, we must be prepared to shape change proactively and to offer flexible and practical training opportunities.

QLEE (The Qualification Network in Lusatia for Renewable Energies) operates at very different levels and, with its innovative ideas, is making a valuable contribution to the development of Lusatia into an economically strong model region for alternative energies. Specifically, QLEE's work is about providing targeted solutions that have a positive impact on companies. And this means recognising opportunities and realising potential.

In all of its activities, QLEE focusses on people. Behind every change process one finds individual biographies, skills and experience, all of which create the foundation for successful change. Without people and without training that is tailored to the needs of employees' change will simply not work.

Learning from one another and with one another - and beyond the confines of one's particular company – is an excellent way to develop a fresh understanding of in-service training and to integrate this qualification into the day-to-day operations of the company in ways that are much more practical and needs-oriented. The best and easiest way to achieve change is by working together.

For structural change and the energy transition to succeed, municipalities and civil society actors need to be sensitised and well informed. And to achieve this, we need methods of communication that explain intelligibly the enormous opportunities that there are for Lusatia in transitioning from fossil fuels to renewable sources of energy.

Creating transparency, getting people on board when there are significant changes to their environment and persuading them to engage with structural change - all of this is worth doing; and this is precisely what QLEE does.

I very much welcome the fact that, with targeted events and consultations, QLEE is informing civil society actors about the positive effects of the energy transition and thereby strengthening people's confidence that this transformation process will succeed. For this, I would very much like to thank the initiators at QLEE and the companies that have joined together in this qualification network.

This practical guide gives an overview of the training and events that have been developed in the network up to now and contains valuable recommendations for any companies wishing to embark on similar courses of action. It is intended to provide guidance and ideas and to encourage people to develop their own solutions. I hope you enjoy putting these ideas into practice and wish you every success in doing so.



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# 1. Introduction

## 1.1 Geopolitical context: Lusatia in transition – region, challenge and key to the energy transition

Lusatia (German: *Lausitz*) is located in south-eastern Germany, spanning the federal states of Brandenburg and Saxony, extending into western Poland and directly bordering the Czech Republic. This location at the tri-border region of Germany–Poland–Czech Republic makes it not only geopolitically significant, but also a potential hub for cross-border cooperation in the fields of energy, education and infrastructure.

The region covers around 13,000 km<sup>2</sup> and has approximately 1.3 million inhabitants, around 350,000 of whom live in Poland. It is characterised by a diverse landscape with extensive forests, river valleys, post-mining landscapes and urban centres such as Cottbus, Görlitz and Bautzen. Lusatia has natural resources that have made it an important location for energy production, particularly lignite, which for decades formed the economic backbone of the region. Today, it offers potential sites for wind and solar energy, well-developed infrastructure and a growing research landscape, with the Brandenburg University of Technology Cottbus-Senftenberg as a key scientific hub.

The Lusatian lignite mining area consists of extraction sites in Lower Lusatia in southern Brandenburg and northern Upper Lusatia in north-eastern Saxony. It is complemented by the Upper Lusatian mining district near Zittau, which extends into Poland. Compared with other German lignite regions, Lusatia exhibits several distinctive features, geographically as well as historically and socio-economically. After 1945, geopolitical realignment led to parts of what had previously been Saxon and Prussian Lusatia being placed under Polish administration. As a result, long-established economic structures across the River Neisse were abruptly divided. Today, the border between Brandenburg and Saxony runs through the mining region, giving rise to federal challenges, for example in the recording and management of lignite production.<sup>1</sup>

<sup>1</sup> <https://www.bbsr.bund.de/BBSR/DE/forschung/fachbeitraege/raumentwicklung/strukturwandel-braunkohlereviere/spannungsfeld-kohleausstieg-lausitz/01-start.html> (accessed on 24 Oct. 2025)

Unlike the other active lignite regions – the Rhenish mining region with Cologne and the Central German mining region with Leipzig – Lusatia lacks a large metropolis as an economic hub. The region is sparsely populated, located on the periphery of the federal territory and has few alternative industrial sectors. These structural conditions make transformation particularly challenging and require intensive measures to strengthen the region's economic structure and create new opportunities.<sup>2</sup>

A large part of Lusatia lies within the traditional settlement area of the Sorbian minority. The Sorbian (Wendish) language, customs and everyday culture remain visible today, for instance in bilingual place and street names. The history of the Sorbian population is closely linked to the development of the lignite industry. Many Sorbian villages were resettled or destroyed by open-cast mining, while generations of Sorbs were employed in coal-related industries. This cultural embedding makes Lusatia a region in which identity, work and change are closely intertwined.<sup>3</sup>

Following German reunification and the political upheaval after 1990, Lusatia lost over 90% of jobs in the coal industry within a few years. The long-established textile industry was also almost entirely dismantled. These profound structural ruptures left a region that continues to struggle with population decline, skills shortages and economic uncertainty to this day.<sup>4</sup>

The planned coal phase-out by 2038 marks another historical turning point, forcing the region to undergo a comprehensive transformation – economically, environmentally and socially. At the same time, this change also presents enormous opportunities: Lusatia can become an innovation hub for renewable energy, hydrogen technologies and sustainable industry. Studies show that the region could harness seven to eight times its current photovoltaic potential. The expansion of wind power, solar energy and green hydrogen infrastructure makes the region a key component of Germany's energy transition.<sup>5</sup>

<sup>2</sup> Landesamt für Denkmalpflege Sachsen (Hrsg.), *Zeugnisse der Braunkohleindustrie im Lausitzer Revier* (2023), p. 13.

<sup>3</sup> Landesamt für Denkmalpflege Sachsen (Hrsg.), *Zeugnisse der Braunkohleindustrie im Lausitzer Revier* (2023), p. 13; <https://www.minderheitensekretariat.de/die-lausitzer-sorben/> (accessed on 24 Oct. 2025)

<sup>4</sup> <https://www.bbsr.bund.de/BBSR/DE/forschung/fachbeitraege/raumentwicklung/strukturwandel-braunkohlereviere/spannungsfeld-kohleausstieg-lausitz/01-start.html> (accessed on 24 Oct. 2025)

<sup>5</sup> <https://www.bbsr.bund.de/BBSR/DE/forschung/fachbeitraege/raumentwicklung/strukturwandel-braunkohlereviere/spannungsfeld-kohleausstieg-lausitz/01-start.html> (accessed on 24 Oct. 2025)

Geopolitically, Lusatia is also gaining importance. The energy crisis triggered by Russia's war against Ukraine has clearly demonstrated the strategic relevance of regional energy production. Transforming Lusatia not only strengthens Germany's energy sovereignty, but also contributes to European security of supply and climate policy. Its tri-border location also opens up potential for cross-border cooperation in research, education and infrastructure.

For this transformation to succeed, more than technological innovation is required; it needs allies – people with the right skills. The Qualification Network in Lusatia for Renewable Energies (QLEE) was established precisely to address this need. It connects companies, local authorities, educational institutions and civil society organisations in order to jointly develop and implement needs-based training programmes. The aim is to secure and expand the region's skilled workforce, thereby embedding the energy transition socially, economically and environmentally.

## 1.2 Purpose and target audience of the handbook

Between 2022 and 2025, the Qualification Network in Lusatia for Renewable Energies (QLEE) was funded under the STARK initiative.<sup>6</sup>

The initiators of this network – LEAG<sup>7</sup>, the Research Institute for Vocational Education (IBBF – Vereinigung für Betriebliche Bildungsforschung e.V.) and the German Renewable Energy Federation (BEE – Bundesverband Erneuerbare Energie e.V.) – share their experiences in this handbook on developing, implementing and managing the network. The handbook is intended to serve as a guide and blueprint for all those embarking on a similar path, providing support for establishing qualification networks as an innovative instrument for regional workforce development and retention.

<sup>6</sup> The STARK initiative is a funding programme of the Federal Ministry for Economic Affairs and Energy (BMWE) that supports projects aimed at strengthening structural development in German coal mining regions. Responsibility for implementation lies with the Federal Office for Economic Affairs and Export Control (BAFA).

<sup>7</sup> LEAG is the joint brand of Lausitz Energie Verwaltungs GmbH, Lausitz Energie Bergbau AG and Lausitz Energie Kraftwerke AG. The companies, headquartered in Cottbus, together form Germany's second-largest electricity producer.

Qualification networks – like networks in general – typically require external impulses and guidance to form and succeed. For this reason, this handbook is primarily aimed at multipliers intending to set up a qualification network. It can also serve as inspiration for company leaders seeking to connect with regional stakeholders.

## 1.3 Overview of contents

This section summarises the main contents of each chapter.

The chapter **Foundations and structure of the qualification network** defines the concept of a qualification network and presents its objectives using the QLEE qualification network as an example. It describes the benefits for those involved, key actors and partners within the network, and discusses raising the network's public profile.

A further chapter presents the **services provided by the network**. On the one hand, this covers networking and qualification programmes for companies. On the other, it focuses on engagement with local authorities and civil society actors.

Particularly successful formats within QLEE's range of services demonstrate the diversity and effectiveness of the network and are presented as **best practices** in a separate chapter.

A final chapter addresses the results of the internal **evaluation** and prepares valuable insights from four years of project work as lessons learned for the adaptation or further development of the network.

Practical checklists and tools in the **annex** support implementation and application in practice.

## 1.4 Evaluation as the basis for successful (collaborative) work

Evaluation processes link a project's content work with its structural development. In projects such as QLEE, which are characterised by inter-institutional cooperation and ongoing change, evaluation is a management tool: it allows regular review, adjustment of measures and visibility of learning processes. Evaluation thus forms the basis not only for quality assurance but also for continuous improvement.

This is not limited to retrospective assessment of results, but also provides ongoing guidance and reflection of processes. Formative evaluations, as conducted in QLEE, play a key role: feedback loops between observation, interpretation and adaptation make implicit collaborative knowledge visible and usable. Evaluation thus becomes a process in which assumptions, routines and strategies can be critically examined.

In addition, measures-based and summative evaluations help to assess the effectiveness of individual activities and structures, providing a solid foundation for future decisions. They show where resources have real impact and where adjustments are needed.

For QLEE, evaluation is more than a methodological tool; it is a central element of a learning-oriented project. By combining process observation, result documentation and joint reflection, it strengthens the network's ability to respond flexibly to change and to shape collaboration as a continuous learning process.

The contents of this handbook follow the same approach, drawing on insights from QLEE's formative evaluation, detailed in the final chapter. The lessons and development impulses presented demonstrate how evaluation can drive quality, cohesion and sustainability in complex network structures.



## 2. Foundations and structure of the qualification network

### 2.1 Definition and objectives of the QLEE qualification network

The programme 'Development of qualification networks' by the Federal Ministry of Labour and Social Affairs defines qualification networks as "networks in which several companies and actors from the training landscape as well as regional labour market stakeholders cooperate so that training measures can be organised and delivered efficiently across company boundaries"<sup>8</sup>. By contrast, the Qualification Network in Lusatia for Renewable Energies (QLEE) is understood as a **collaboration of regional companies** united by a shared goal: jointly managing the structural transition from coal to a model region for alternative energy, contributing to strengthening Lusatia's economy. All participating companies are motivated by the ongoing need for skilled personnel and share an interest in cross-company training initiatives.

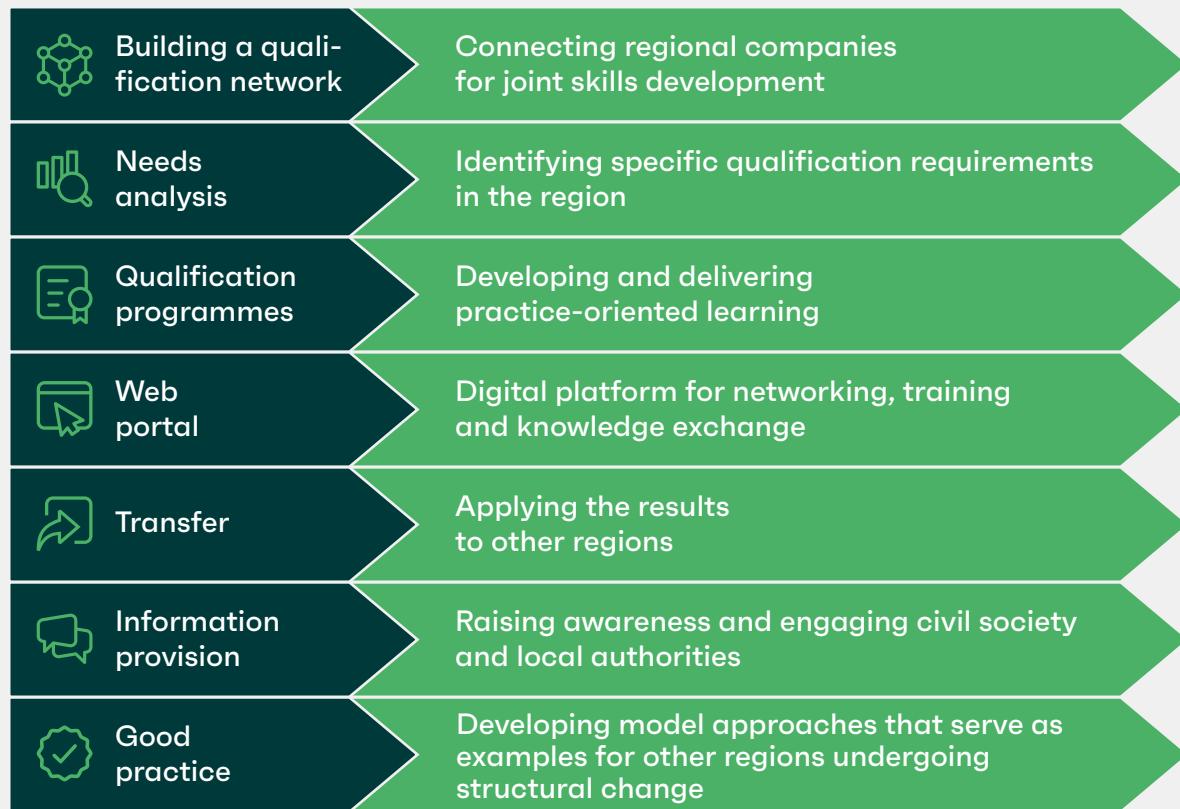
The defining characteristic of the QLEE network lies in its **specific structure** as a network with a **lead company**. While other qualification networks may be managed by coordination offices<sup>9</sup>, **LEAG forms the core of QLEE**, acting as a partner to SMEs and supporting their training activities.

In addition to regional companies supported by QLEE in their personnel development, the network's **target group** includes technical and managerial staff requiring training, as well as municipal and civil society actors.

<sup>8</sup> <https://www.bmas.de/DE/Arbeit/Aus-und-Weiterbildung/Berufliche-Weiterbildung/Weiterbildungsverbende/weiterbildungsverbende.html#doc442a8962-b8a5-4746-9449-5a8b3c34575bbodyText1> (accessed on 28 Oct. 2025)

<sup>9</sup> For results from previous network activities, see in particular f-bb & iftp within bfw (2025) ([https://www.f-bb.de/fileadmin/Projekte/WBV/Empfehlungspapier\\_forum\\_wbv.pdf](https://www.f-bb.de/fileadmin/Projekte/WBV/Empfehlungspapier_forum_wbv.pdf) – accessed on 28 Oct. 2025) as well as BMAS (2025) (<https://www.publikationen-bundesregierung.de/pp-de/publikationssuche/weiterbildungsverbende-2354768> – accessed on 28 Oct. 2025)

The following graphic illustrates the **objectives** of the qualification network:



QLEE focuses on the structural transformation of Lusatia into a model region for renewable energy. The network is therefore firmly rooted in the region and its member companies operate in sectors related to the energy transition.

The structure and objectives of qualification networks vary depending on regional challenges (sector-specific or cross-sectoral, regional or supra-regional, time-limited or open-ended, etc.).

A good overview of the different profiles and types of qualification networks found in practice is provided by the Guideline on the Establishment and Management of Qualification Networks<sup>10</sup> and the Action Recommendations of the Coordination Centre for Qualification Networks (forum wbv)<sup>11</sup>.

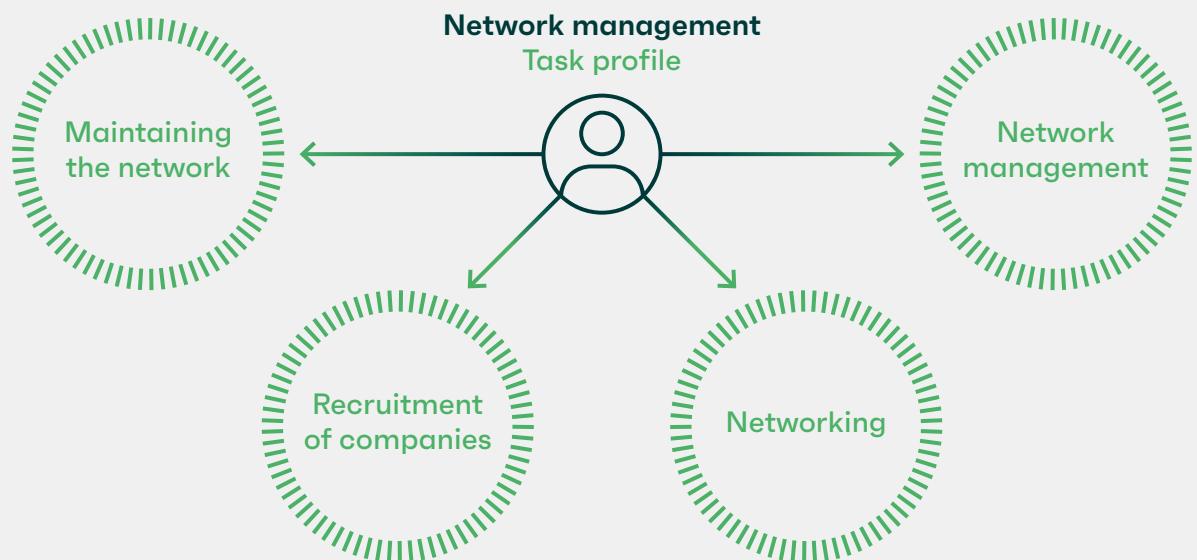
## 2.2 Key roles within the network

There are two key roles that must be considered in every qualification network: the role of **network management** and the contact person on the company side, referred to here as the '**liaison officer**'.

### Description of roles and responsibilities: network management

Network management is the central hub connecting all parties within the qualification network. At the same time, it fulfils a guiding, connecting and multiplying role:

„I shape the network as a living system of learning and cooperation in which knowledge, stakeholders and projects are interconnected in such a way that the Lusatia region attracts and retains skilled workers and advances future technologies. I am committed to ensuring that the member companies learn with and from one another.“



<sup>10</sup> Bildungswerk der Baden-Württembergischen Wirtschaft e.V. (Educational Institute of the Baden-Württemberg Employers' Association) (2025): Weiterbildung im Unternehmensverbund. Leitfaden zu Aufbau und Steuerung von Qualifizierungsverbünden. [https://www.biwe.de/fileadmin/biwe/pdfs/PDF\\_2025/Leitfaden\\_Qualifizierungsverbuende\\_2025.pdf](https://www.biwe.de/fileadmin/biwe/pdfs/PDF_2025/Leitfaden_Qualifizierungsverbuende_2025.pdf)

<sup>11</sup> Forschungsinstitut Betriebliche Bildung (Research Institute for Vocational Education, f-bb) gGmbH/ Institut für Forschung, Training und Projekte (Institute for Research, Training and Projects, iftp) within bfw (2025): Erkenntnisse aus der Verbundarbeit der Weiterbildungsverbünde. [https://www.f-bb.de/fileadmin/Projekte/WBV/Empfehlungspapier\\_forum\\_wbv.pdf](https://www.f-bb.de/fileadmin/Projekte/WBV/Empfehlungspapier_forum_wbv.pdf)

The task profile of network management within a qualification network comprises various facets, resulting in a demanding portfolio of responsibilities:

**Maintaining the network** involves the continuous establishment, preservation and further development of sustainable relationships within the qualification network. This includes active relationship management and ensuring a regular flow of information to all participating companies, as well as between the companies themselves. This relationship work focuses on building trust, transparency and mutual appreciation. The aim is to create a sense of belonging to the network (in the sense of "we are the network").

The **recruitment of companies** serves the strategic expansion of the network by attracting new member companies. A key initial step is identifying relevant companies within a sector or region. Based on the network's objectives and identified needs, a sustainable recruitment strategy is then developed. Potential member companies can be approached through direct personal contact as well as through participation in events (network meetings, regional events or sector-specific events). The accession process is organised via a standardised onboarding process (see Appendix 7.1).

**Networking activities** extend beyond the member companies and include network partners, multipliers and other relevant training and labour market stakeholders. To this end, network management must be familiar with the relevant networks, actively participate in them and help shape them. The network manager independently initiates network meetings and exchange formats for network members.

**Network management for training** is a task that should be understood as an iterative process. The consolidation of training needs is coordinated and brought together by network management. The analysis of sector-specific developments and the prioritisation of derived needs take place in close coordination with the training development team. This forms the basis for programme and offer development within the network. Evaluation and the establishment of reflection loops contribute to quality assurance and further development at both operational and strategic levels.



The network requires an identifiable figure who is known and visible both internally and externally. One of the most important tasks is the development of a shared network identity. This can be achieved through the visibility of joint successes, the cultivation of rituals and regular communication formats. A clear concept and structured onboarding process support the recruitment of new network members. Needs assessment should be conducted methodically, in a structured manner and at regular intervals. Appendix 7.2 outlines the competencies a network manager should ideally possess.

### Description of roles and responsibilities: liaison officer

The liaison officer acts as the interface between their own company and the qualification network. They communicate training needs, concerns and feedback from within the company into the network and convey relevant information, offers and decisions from the network back into the company. At the same time, the liaison officer acts as an ambassador, information hub and cooperation partner:

„I ensure that my company's training topics are heard within the network and actively participate in the network so that the benefits and added value can unfold within my organisation and be used effectively.“



The task profile of a liaison officer in a qualification network comprises various facets:

**Implementation management** covers organisational aspects related to employees' participation in network activities. This includes promoting the transfer of learning outcomes into everyday work and encouraging internal learning or exchange formats. The person documents and reports on experiences, participation figures and impacts within the company with regard to network activities.

**Ensuring the flow of information** provides for continuous communication between member companies and network management. The liaison officer acts as an interface, forwarding information from the network in a targeted manner to senior management, HR managers and employees — particularly specialist departments. Communication also flows into the network, ensuring that needs, feedback and ideas from the company are fed into the network's activities.

The liaison officer coordinates **needs and resource assessments** for their respective company. This involves using formats that regularly identify qualification and training needs, in coordination with the relevant business units (e.g. specialist departments). This requires clarity regarding priorities and target groups for measures so that these can be communicated to network management. The liaison officer supports the planning and selection of suitable training programmes from the network's portfolio.

Within the framework of **cooperation and networking**, the liaison officer actively contributes to maintaining the network, for example by participating in network meetings, networking events and jointly organised formats. In doing so, they promote a positive culture of relationships and cooperation within their own company by making the idea of the network visible and carrying it forward. The liaison officer can be understood as a kind of ambassador who embeds the network's objectives within the company.



The selection of a liaison officer is critical to success. This role should be assumed by someone who is well connected within the company, able to assess and evaluate different dimensions of need (technical and HR-related) and has a genuine interest in actively contributing to the network.

## 2.3 Network partnerships

As described above, the member companies are at the centre of QLEE; they form the network and are supported by the network team (the three initiators).

The qualification network is an important regional actor that supports management of structural change in cooperation with numerous partners.

On the one hand, the QLEE network consists of **cooperation partnerships governed by binding cooperation agreements**. These include:

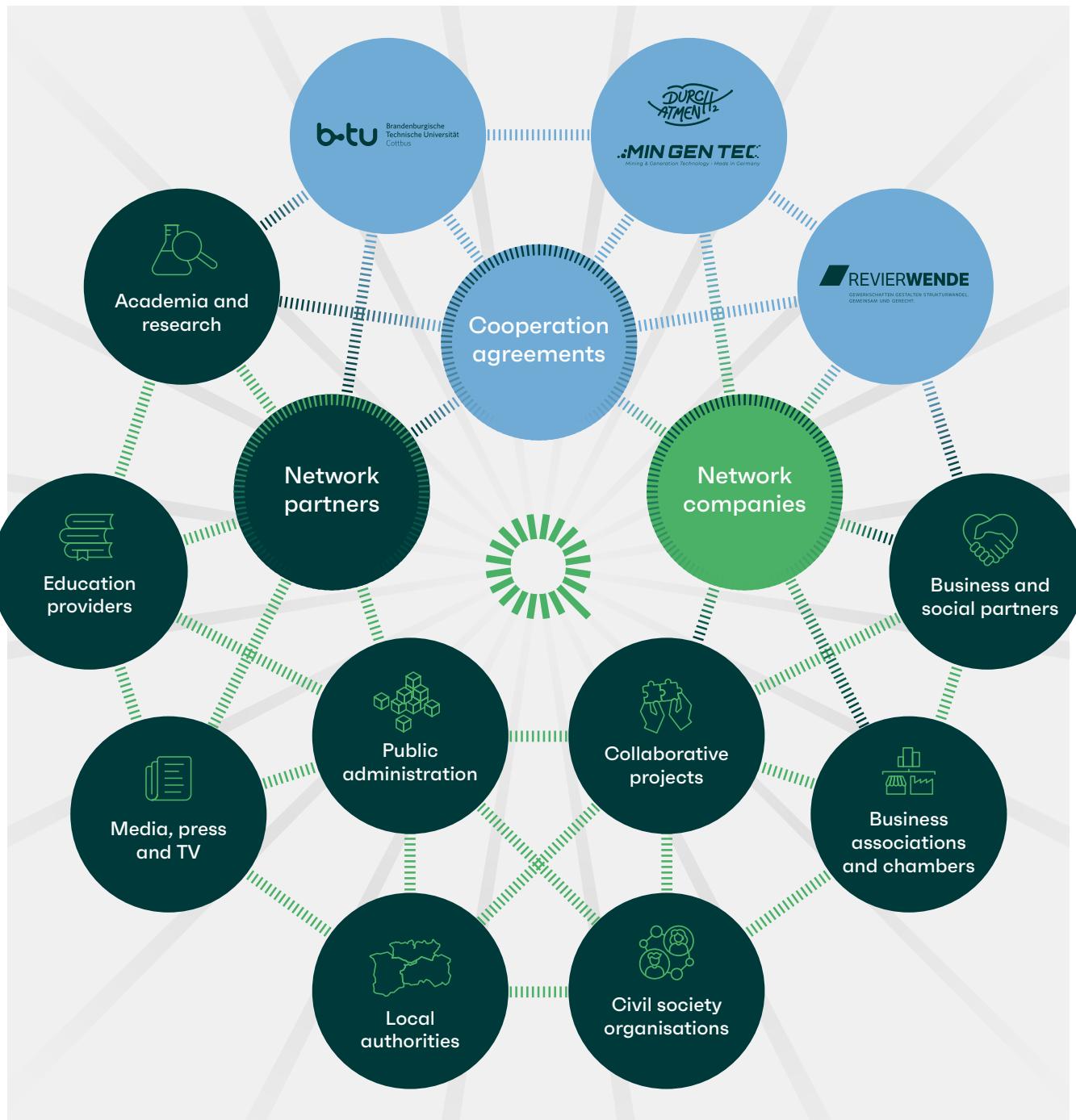
- » Brandenburg University of Technology Cottbus–Senftenberg (BTU)
- » Cottbus Chamber of Industry and Commerce (IHK Cottbus), including the projects MinGenTec and DURCH2ATMEN
- » the STARK project REVIERWENDE.

In addition, QLEE is networked with **regional labour market stakeholders** from the following areas:

- » business associations and chambers
- » social partners
- » education providers
- » public administration and local authorities
- » civil society organisations
- » projects/institutions with synergies with QLEE (future and competence centres)
- » media partners

This robust and well-structured network between the participating institutions represents a key prerequisite for the successful implementation of the qualification network:

- » Functionally, continuous exchange enables coordination of joint training measures and the sustainable embedding of qualification processes
- » In terms of cooperation, effective implementation of qualification measures can only be ensured through trust-based collaboration, aligned objectives and the joint development of resources
- » Strategically and organisationally, the network acts as an infrastructure that supports the qualification network and provides stability. It creates the organisational framework for communication, coordination and joint development, without which long-term success would be hard to imagine



The effectiveness of a qualification network depends largely on the quality and intensity of network relationships. Only through an active, learning network can synergies be leveraged, needs identified at an early stage and innovative qualification formats developed.

## 2.4 Visibility of the network

The visibility of the QLEE qualification network is a key success factor for its impact in the Lusatia region. It helps to raise awareness of the project, build trust and attract new partners and participants. Strategically planned and consistently implemented public relations work strengthens the network's positioning as a relevant actor in structural change and in securing skilled labour for renewable energy (see Appendix 7.3).

### Communication strategy as a foundation

Effective communication is based on a communication strategy that systematically brings together objectives, target groups, key messages, channels and measures. It provides clarity on the orientation of public relations work, facilitates coordination within the network and ensures consistency in external communication. Such a strategy helps to deploy resources in a targeted manner, leverage synergies and make the impact of communication measurable (see Appendix 7.4).

### Digital and analogue communication channels

To achieve broad and targeted visibility, it is advisable to use a combination of digital and analogue communication channels. The network's **website** serves as the central information platform on which current offers, events and success stories are presented. In addition, **social media channels** such as LinkedIn, Instagram or Facebook enable low-threshold engagement with different target groups and support community building. When selecting suitable social media platforms, it is advisable to assess where potential members and partners are already active. A brief analysis of the digital presence of companies, municipal actors or civil society groups can help identify the right channels and align communication effectively (see Appendix 7.5).

A regularly published **newsletter** informs members, partners and interested parties about new developments and invites participation. Online events and webinars are also suitable formats for sharing information and encouraging exchange.

Alongside digital formats, traditional communication tools continue to play an important role. **Flyers, brochures and posters** can be distributed at trade fairs, conferences or within companies to generate local visibility. **Press work**, such as articles in regional media, interviews or press releases, increases public awareness and strengthens the network's credibility. Presence at trade fairs, specialist events and municipal events also offers opportunities to engage directly with potential partners and participants.

### Strategies for promoting offers

The promotion of offers should always be tailored to **specific target groups**. Companies require different information and forms of communication than municipal representatives or civil society organisations. Cooperation with multipliers such as business development agencies, chambers, education providers or mayors can help extend reach and build trust. **Storytelling** is particularly effective: success stories from the region, for example from participants who have found new career prospects through QLEE, make the network's impact tangible and encourage participation.

### Activating reach multipliers

A particularly effective lever for promoting activities is the targeted activation of key individuals or multipliers with wide reach. These include regional institutions such as business development agencies, chambers, municipal administrations, education providers or civil society organisations. They have established communication channels and direct access to the network's target groups. Their involvement – such as sharing information, co-hosting events or making personal recommendations – can significantly increase reach and improve the precision of outreach.

To involve multipliers effectively, early engagement is recommended, along with transparent communication about the network's objectives and benefits, and the provision of materials that can be easily shared. A **communication kit** with text modules, flyers or presentations facilitates this process and supports joint public relations work.

### Recognisability through corporate design

Visibility should be reviewed and further developed on a regular basis. This includes analysing reach, participant numbers and feedback, as well as adjusting the communication strategy based on evaluation findings. Public relations work is therefore not only the responsibility of network management, but a shared task for all involved. The communication kit mentioned above, with text modules, images and templates, can facilitate the active involvement of partners and sustainably strengthen the network's impact.

### Monitoring and further development

Visibility should be reviewed and further developed on a regular basis. This includes analysing reach, participant numbers and feedback, as well as adjusting the communication strategy based on evaluation findings. Public relations work is therefore not only the responsibility of network management, but a shared task for all involved. The communication kit mentioned above, with text modules, images and templates, can facilitate the active involvement of partners and sustainably strengthen the network's impact.

## 2.5 Benefits and value of qualification networks

The benefits of a qualification network are diverse and extend far beyond **needs-based training** for employees in companies as well as municipal and civil society actors. These include, among other things, the following effects:

Efficient use of resources. Through joint planning and implementation of qualification measures, costs can be reduced and duplicate structures avoided.

Knowledge exchange among participants. Within the network, experiences, best practices and innovative approaches can be shared, leading to faster and more sustainable development of training programmes. Increased flexibility and adaptability. This makes it easier to respond quickly to changes in the market or the legal framework and strengthens the competitiveness of all participants.

Enhanced motivation and retention of employees. This increases identification with the company.

Access to extended networks. This promotes regional cooperation.

Targeted training strengthens the local workforce base, making a significant contribution to **securing skilled labour and reinforcing regional economic strength**.

Other key effects of establishing qualification networks include:

**Networking and cooperation:** building stable networks between companies, education providers, local authorities and civil society organisations; promoting exchange and mutual learning (including across sector boundaries).

**Promoting innovation:** developing new training formats and learning methods; integrating future competencies and soft skills (e.g. communication, willingness to embrace change, democratic resilience).

**Efficiency through shared resources:** pooling expertise, infrastructure and funding; avoiding duplicate structures and inefficient individual measures.

Overall, the comprehensive offers of the qualification network make an important **contribution to socio-ecological transformation and to strengthening regional identity**, by:

- » embedding the energy transition within society
- » strengthening public acceptance of structural change and the energy transition
- » promoting participation and co-creation in transformation processes as well as sustainable development through education and involvement.





# 3. Services of the network

## 3.1 Networking companies

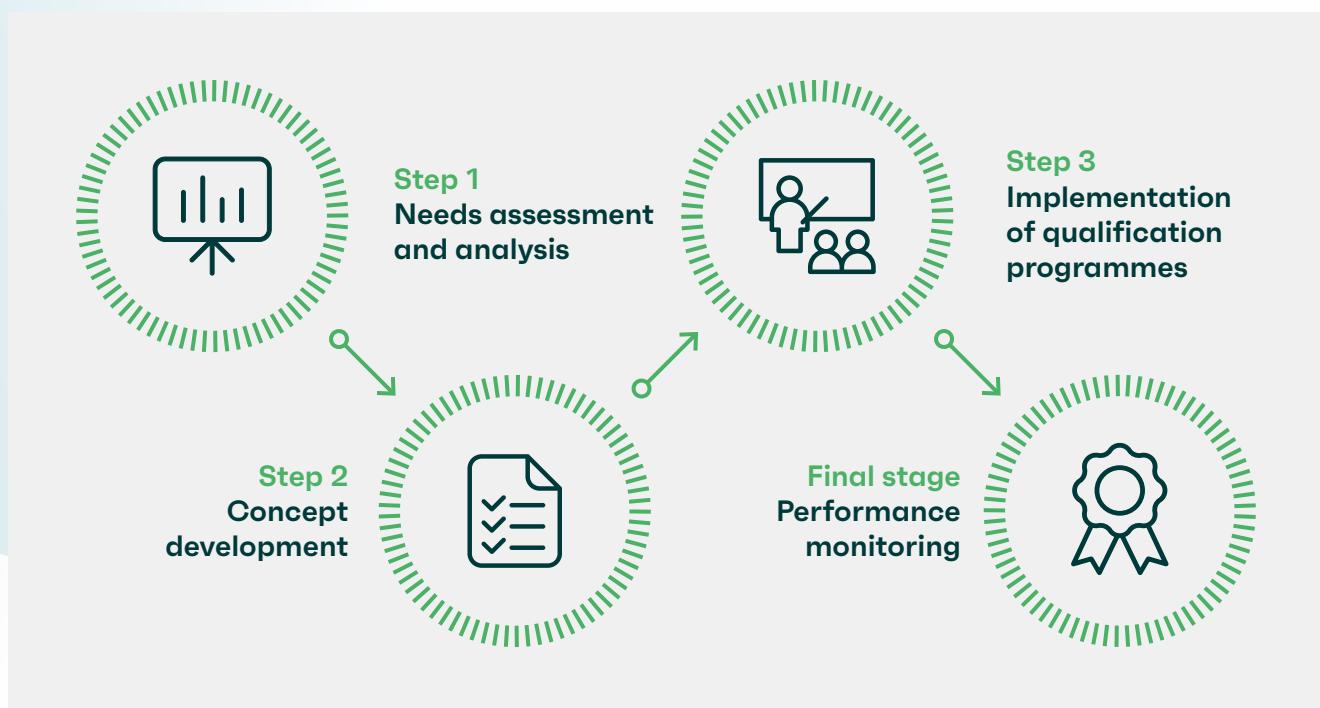
A key format within the network's activities is the regular quarterly **network meetings**. Here, the member companies get to know one another better, receive input on topics agreed with them in advance and exchange experiences with one another.

In addition to the network meetings, '**HTO workshops**' (Human–Technology–Organisation workshops; German: MTO-Workshop) are conducted as part of the qualification needs assessment process. Although these workshops explicitly focus on reflecting on internal organisational and personnel development processes, they also serve as an important networking tool.

The added value of both formats lies in looking beyond the confines of one's own company, gaining insight into the challenges and solutions of other firms, and, not least, in identifying shared training needs.

## 3.2 Training programmes for companies

The development of needs-based training programmes for member companies follows a standardised process:



In the first step, needs are identified and analysed, followed by concept development. The third and fourth steps comprise on-site implementation and evaluation of results.

In addition to technical courses, the training programmes also include commercial courses and soft skills training. Classroom-based courses are delivered at the training centre of co-initiator LEAG in Lübbenau. The provision of digitally supported training programmes via a learning management system enables learning independent of location and time and contributes to knowledge and results transfer as well as collaborative working.



### Step 1: Needs assessment and analysis

During the four-year project period, different methods were used to identify training needs within companies. At the outset, a **two-stage interview model** was favoured, consisting of an online introductory interview (see Appendix 7.6) and a structured interview at the company (see Appendix 7.7), which primarily served to recruit member companies.

At a later stage, when the network had already grown and inspired by experiences from Austrian qualification networks, a **needs matrix** in the form of an Excel spreadsheet was used, into which companies could independently enter their needs.

In order to better meet the diverse requirements and heterogeneity of the network, additional interactive needs assessment formats were integrated as the QLEE network increased in size and complexity. Particularly noteworthy are the **HTO workshops**, which were established in the QLEE network as a participatory, dialogue-oriented best practice method (see Section 4.1).



### Step 2: Concept development

The identification and analysis of qualification needs in the QLEE network form the starting point for the development of continuing training programmes, which are based on a modular **blended learning concept**.

Particular attention is paid to **integrating classroom and online phases**: self-directed learning phases, interactive webinars and practice-oriented in-person sessions alternate throughout the programme. In addition, trainers are explicitly encouraged to integrate **practical projects** into the didactic concept. Real-life application examples, excursions, group work and transfer tasks support application-oriented learning and encourage exchange among participants.

In addition, the development of **asynchronous learning offers within the learning management system**, jointly designed by the responsible specialists, is planned for each module.



### Step 3: Implementation of qualification programmes

The foundation for successful delivery of QLEE training programmes is laid during an intensive and detailed **preparation phase**. In addition to *contract management* with instructors, this includes entering the training programmes into the central *event management platform IDLOOM*.

*Participant management within Moodle* is another key element of preparation. This is complemented by the organisation of logistical aspects (accommodation, catering, excursions).

Operational **delivery** begins on the day of the event with *welcoming* participants and a digital *check-in*.

During the event, the organisation team manages and monitors all logistical and organisational processes and documents all relevant data in order to enable transparent follow-up.

After completion of the training programme, a comprehensive **follow-up phase** takes place, in which all key documents such as attendance lists, evaluation forms and event reports are centrally archived.



### Final stage: Performance monitoring

Evaluations focus, among other things, on the content, structure and practical relevance of the individual modules. In addition to subject-specific and structural criteria, the methods and media used are also assessed in terms of their usefulness, appropriateness and acceptance by participants (see Appendix 7.8).

The results of the evaluations as well as the final interviews conducted are analysed and serve as the basis for continuous improvement of the training programmes.



All four steps – from needs assessment and analysis, through concept development and on-site implementation to performance monitoring – are essential for the success of tailored training measures. The systematic approach underpinning this process ensures a high standard of quality. With each repetition, compliance with all four steps becomes more routine.

### 3.3 Involvement of local authorities and civil society actors

The involvement of local authorities and civil society actors is a central component of the QLEE qualification network. It helps to anchor the energy transition and structural change not only technically, but also socially. Local authorities and community-based organisations have an important multiplier function, are regarded as trusted institutions and actively shape regional change. Their involvement creates proximity to local communities and promotes acceptance of new technologies and educational offers.

#### Why this involvement plays a key role

The active involvement of these groups goes far beyond a supporting function; it is a core service of the network because it brings the energy transition into the wider society. Local authorities shape the framework conditions for local development, civil society organisations reach people in their everyday lives and young people bring fresh perspectives and optimism for the future. Their involvement ensures that training programmes are not developed in isolation but emerge from the region and for the region.

At the same time, the network itself benefits in several ways: through practical feedback, through dissemination of its offers via existing networks and through strengthened social legitimacy. The involvement of these groups increases visibility, promotes the quality of programmes and creates a broad foundation for sustainable impact.

### Local authorities as a strategic lever

Local authorities are key actors in the implementation of energy transition projects, securing skilled labour and shaping regional development. Within QLEE, they were involved through various formats, such as information events, introductory energy courses, and dialogue and exchange formats. These formats offer municipal representatives the opportunity to obtain information, build competencies and actively contribute to shaping the network.

The Cooperation with the so called **Lausitzrunde**, an alliance of Lusatian municipalities affected by structural change, demonstrates the importance of involving municipal perspectives at an early stage. These actors not only contribute strategic expertise but also help identify regional needs and align the network's offers accordingly.

### Civil society as a bridge to the public

Civil society organisations such as **sports clubs, volunteer fire brigades, neighbourhood initiatives or local associations** are deeply rooted in the region and enjoy a high level of trust. They reach people who are often difficult to engage through traditional education and economic structures. Cooperation with civil society actors has shown how low-threshold formats can help to bring the topic of renewable energy to a broader audience and activate new target groups.

### Young people as ambassadors of the energy transition

A particularly important target group consists of young adults aged between 18 and 27. They are at the beginning of their professional careers and at the same time are the generation that will shape the energy transition in the long term. They bring openness to new technologies, digital competencies and a high degree of willingness to innovate. Qualifying them as ambassadors creates multipliers who can reach their generation, generate enthusiasm for sustainable solutions and actively drive social change. Their credibility and engagement are crucial for anchoring the energy transition not only technically, but also culturally and socially.

### Formats for participation and activation

A number of formats, designed to be both low-threshold and practice-oriented, have proven effective for successfully involving municipalities, civil society organisations and young people (see Appendix 7.9). Information events provide basic insights into the energy transition, training opportunities and regional development prospects. They create space for exchange, reduce barriers and offer initial points of contact with the topic, especially for municipal representatives and local initiatives.

Complementing this, introductory courses for beginners are aimed at people without a technical background who wish to gain practical insights into technologies such as photovoltaics, onshore wind energy or hydrogen. These courses promote understanding of the energy transition and open up new perspectives for professional and social participation.

A particularly innovative format is the Future Academy Lusatia (German: Zukunftsakademie Lausitz -ZAK), which is specifically aimed at young adults aged between 18 and 27. It qualifies them as ambassadors of the energy transition and, alongside technical fundamentals, also imparts future-oriented competencies such as openness to change, communication skills and democratic participation. ZAK promotes the development of a shared mindset for change and strengthens the participants' ability to actively shape change, both professionally and socially. (see Chapter 4.3 for the ZAK concept.)



For regions or organisations wishing to initiate similar participation processes, a combination of information formats, practice-oriented courses and dialogical educational offers is recommended. It is important to involve target groups at an early stage, understand their needs and develop formats that foster not only knowledge but also attitudes and engagement. The experience gained through QLEE shows that participation is particularly successful where people feel taken seriously, recognise concrete opportunities for action and can become part of a broader process of change.

## Mindset, soft skills and democratic resilience

The energy transition and structural transformation require not only technical knowledge, but also soft skills and an attitude that views change as an opportunity.

QLEE formats therefore also deliberately develop competencies such as teamwork, conflict resolution, self-efficacy and democratic participation. These skills strengthen participants' capacity to act and foster a culture of collaboration.

In light of social tensions and increasing polarisation, it is also important to address how to deal with populism and anti-democratic tendencies. Through workshops and moderated dialogue formats, participants learn how to communicate constructively in their environments, uphold democratic values and deal with controversial opinions. These formats not only enhance the resilience of the actors involved but also contribute to strengthening social cohesion – an essential factor for the successful implementation of the energy transition and structural transformation.



Target groups such as local authorities, young people and civil society organisations are crucial. Their involvement is not a side issue but a strategic building block for the network's impact. It ensures that the energy transition is anchored not only technically but also socially and culturally. Particularly in rural regions such as Lusatia, these actors are often the first points of contact for citizens; their support is therefore decisive for the acceptance and success of training measures.



# 4. Best practices

## 4.1 Networking

The following section describes various formats that have been successfully used within QLEE to promote networking. These include networking offers for companies as well as for local authorities and civil society institutions.

The best practice examples serve as inspiration for the development of similar networking formats.

### Network meetings on the promotion of company-based training

As mentioned above, a key format of the network's activities consists of the regular quarterly **network meetings**. Dates are coordinated and communicated at the beginning of the year, allowing member companies to plan ahead.

In addition to fixed agenda items such as introducing new network members, the status of current training activities and defining the next steps, each network meeting has a thematic focus.

One particularly successful event was the network meeting held at the premises of the Zukunftsteam Lausitz of the Federal Employment Agency in Senftenberg, which focused on the promotion of company-based training.



Through presentations by the Zukunftsteam Lausitz of the Employer Service and the regional economic development agency, the member companies gained detailed insights into funding opportunities in Brandenburg and the tools offered by the Federal Employment Agency. They also had the opportunity to meet their designated contact persons directly on site.

In addition, the meeting generated significant added value for the speakers themselves, as it enabled them to look beyond their own programmes and gain first-hand insights into the support needs of businesses through direct dialogue with the companies.

This event represents a successful example of a network in action.

### Human – Technology – Organisation (HTO) workshop

A prerequisite for establishing and embedding a regional and sector-specific qualification network is the **identification of company-level training needs**. One of the core tasks of the network is to create opportunities and develop a methodologically guided approach that supports companies in reflecting on current challenges within their specific organisational contexts and deriving corresponding training needs. In particular, this systematic bundling of needs is often insufficiently addressed in business practice, especially in SMEs, for example due to a lack of resources.

In addition to company-specific needs assessments in the form of interviews (see Section 3.2), cross-company **HTO workshops** have proven effective in network practice. This is because transformation requires a holistic approach to employees, technology and the organisation itself. The HTO concept was used to systematise and structure needs assessment. The HTO approach originates from work science and was developed by Eberhard Ulich<sup>12</sup>. Within the context of needs assessment, the concept was adapted to the conditions of the qualification network and used as a reflective tool.

The HTO concept assumes that employees, technologies and organisations are **interdependent** and must therefore be reflected upon in their **interaction**. Any change in one of the three sub-areas has repercussions for the others. The objective of the workshop is for each company to first reflect on and analyse its own challenges within the three subsystems in a structured sequence.

<sup>12</sup> Strohm, O. & Ulich, E. (1997). Unternehmen arbeitspsychologisch bewerten. Ein Mehr-Ebenen-Ansatz unter besonderer Berücksichtigung von Mensch, Technik, Organisation. Zürich: vdf Hochschulverlag.

After each phase, the company representatives present their challenges and discuss possible courses of action with other participants. These actions are translated into **concrete training needs** by the end of the workshop. Four guiding principles underpin the workshops: observing rather than judging, reflecting on interdependencies, identifying room for manoeuvre and leveraging synergies.



In all organisational change processes, the three dimensions (human, technology and organisation) can always be considered together and used as an analytical tool, rather than optimising individual aspects in isolation.

#### The three dimensions in practical terms:

**Human:** How are employees enabled and involved?

*Beispiel: Introduction of a new tool combined with training, learning support and feedback loops.*

**Technology:** How does technology support or overwhelm people?

*Beispiel: Automation may reduce workload but can also trigger negative emotions, such as a perceived loss of control.*

**Organisation:** How are processes, decision-making pathways and roles designed?

*Beispiel: Even the best software is of little use if responsibilities are unclear.*

Appendix 7.10 illustrates the process of an HTO analysis.

## 4.2 Training programmes

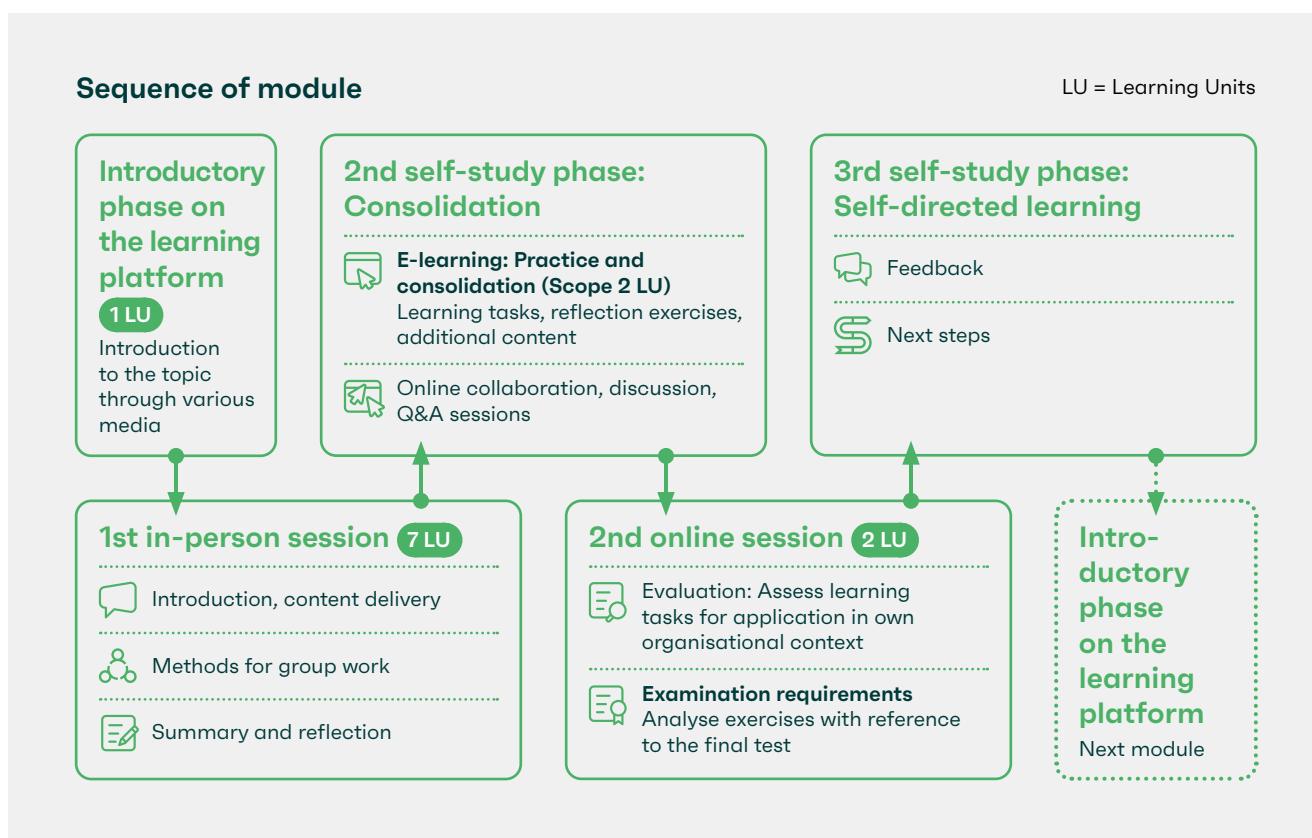
The following section presents two exemplary training programmes that were not only particularly in demand, but also represent best practice examples of programmes developed and used within the network. In principle, the training measures are aimed at employees of regional small and medium-sized enterprises, as well as LEAG staff. Local authorities and civil society actors also benefit from participation in QLEE, for example by gaining an understanding of new technologies through introductory courses.

## Hydrogen applications specialist with IHK certificate

The training programme 'Hydrogen applications specialist with IHK certificate' is based on a concept developed by the Cottbus Chamber of Industry and Commerce (German: IHK) and concludes with an official IHK certificate. It provides fundamental knowledge on hydrogen applications within companies. The qualification is aimed at specialists and managers who wish to explore the potential of hydrogen as an energy carrier for themselves and their organisations and to drive initial implementation steps, particularly in the areas of mobility and logistics, production, energy (supply) and carbon footprint management.

The programme was delivered in a blended learning format consisting of seven modules, each comprising ten teaching units:

- Module 1:** Ecological and economic fundamentals
- Module 2:** Properties of hydrogen
- Module 3:** Hydrogen production
- Module 4:** Application areas of hydrogen technology
- Module 5:** Storage, transport and hydrogen storage
- Module 6:** Environmental protection and occupational safety
- Module 7:** Regulations and legal foundations



Each module started on Fridays with an in-person session at LEAG's Training Centre in Lübbenau. The following Wednesday, an online session (via MS Teams) took place in which participants discussed reflection and practice questions with the respective lecturer, asked questions and engaged in discussions.

For each module, additional information, homework assignments and reflection and practice questions in the form of multiple-choice and free-text tasks were made available online. The learning management system enabled learning independent of location and time and allowed participants to progress at an individual pace tailored to their personal learning progress.

The final in-person session included the IHK examination, which was conducted online in the computer lab at the LEAG Training Centre.

A special feature of this programme was the integration of video recordings from the in-person sessions. These were edited (e.g. breaks and discussions removed) and supplemented with a presentation overlay so that the lecturer's exact wording could be assigned to each slide shown.

Another distinctive feature was the academic support provided during the pilot delivery by the Brandenburg University of Technology Cottbus-Senftenberg – especially by the Chair of Thermal Energy Engineering, the Hydrogen Research Centre under the leadership of Prof. Dr Lars Röntzsch and the Centre for Continuing Scientific Education. As a result, participants were able to receive 4 credit points out of a total of 100 teaching units.

This close integration of academic expertise and practice-oriented continuing education not only demonstrates a high quality standard, but also makes an important contribution to tackling skills shortages in the region. By directly linking scientific findings with vocational qualification, synergies are created that support individual career development while strengthening the innovative capacity of the education landscape as a whole.

### Introductory courses on renewable energy technologies

The QLEE introductory courses are one-day, in-person seminars aimed at non-technical participants from public administrations, SMEs, associations and municipal bodies. The content covers basic technical principles, economic considerations, legal frameworks and concrete implementation processes. The face-to-face format encourages intensive exchange between municipalities, companies and associations. Parts of the course series are delivered in cooperation with QLEE partners and network members. This increases professional credibility and makes the content immediately comprehensible for participants, as speakers contribute real projects and practical implementation knowledge from the region. Through practical case studies and experience-based reports from Lusatia, theoretical content can be directly transferred to local decision-making contexts, providing participants with greater confidence to act. Partners also bring established networks within municipalities, associations and companies, which significantly improves participant recruitment, diversity of attendance and acceptance of the courses.

Introductory courses on renewable energy add value and are particularly effective when they are regionally embedded, low-threshold and designed to facilitate networking. Regional practical examples and speakers from Lusatia increase the relevance of the content and build trust among participants by making local challenges and solution pathways directly visible. Clear language, no assumed prior knowledge and action-oriented preparation reduce barriers and enable broad participation. In-person formats also offer valuable networking potential by bringing together employees from municipalities, companies and associations. The heterogeneous participant group can be used deliberately by specifically addressing municipal networks and civil society organisations in order to incorporate different perspectives and practical knowledge (see Appendix 7.11).

## 4.3 Formats for municipalities and civil society actors

QUEE's programmes for municipalities, civil society institutions and young people is built around defined formats. Each format has a clear objective, a typical target group and defined outputs. The combination of short digital formats, full-day in-person courses, multi-day activation programmes and systematic stakeholder discussions creates points of entry for public administrations, associations, SMEs and young people. The following best-practice examples illustrate successful events, methods and implementation steps in a practice-oriented manner.

## energieXchange as a digital discussion series

The energieXchange is a public digital discussion series run by QLEE that addresses current and regionally relevant topics of the energy transition in compact sessions lasting 90–120 minutes. The format combines focused expert input with practical best-practice examples and a moderated discussion, allows for direct questions from participants and provides immediately actionable guidance. The energieXchange format serves both as an information service and networking platform for public administrations and companies.

The format is particularly effective when it is concise, practice-oriented and low-threshold. Its digital delivery enables broad and rapid access for employees from public administrations, companies and associations. Short, focused sessions reflect the time pressure faced by administrations and businesses. Clear impulses and concrete best practice examples make content immediately actionable and reduce implementation barriers by demonstrating realistic pathways and proven solutions. Live exchange, moderated Q&A sessions and clearly prepared follow-up materials foster networking between stakeholders and guide interested participants towards more in-depth formats. Regular sessions also increase the visibility of QLEE offers, support recruitment for training programmes and strengthen the network's profile in the region.

The energieXchange is a scalable digital format that combines rapid access to knowledge, concrete guidance for action and networking, thereby effectively supporting local transformation processes (see Appendix 7.12 and Appendix 7.13).

## Future Academy Lusatia

The involvement of young people is central to the societal anchoring of structural change in Lusatia. Formats must be low-threshold, practice-oriented and binding, in order to build trust, strengthen local capacity for action and create lasting networks. The Future Academy Lusatia (German: Zukunftsakademie Lausitz - ZAK) is a proven example of how a multi-day education and activation format systematically meets these requirements and integrates into the QLEE network's portfolio.

ZAK is a multi-day intensive format for young adults (aged 18–27) and multipliers, delivered by QLEE together with partners such as DGB REVIERWENDE and DGB Jugend Berlin Brandenburg. Its aim is to impart knowledge about the energy transition, highlight career and participation options and qualify participants as ambassadors of transformation. Methodologically, ZAK combines workshops on technology and

career pathways, simulation-based small-group work, practice-oriented excursions to open-cast mines, solar and wind farms, as well as creative visioning methods and policy dialogue.

### Programme design and didactic logic

ZAK follows a clear learning progression: arrival and alignment of expectations create a shared starting point; regional introductions and context-specific inputs anchor knowledge; technology and career workshops provide technical understanding and orientation; excursions make transformation visible and emotionally tangible; moderated creative and pitch formats consolidate insights and connect participants with decision-makers. Simulation elements and work in three thematic perspective groups (economic, social, ecological) promote different perspectives, empathy and the ability to develop intersectoral solutions (see Appendix 7.14).

### Why this format works

Practical relevance: Local sites of transformation (open-cast mining, renaturation, solar and wind installations, innovation sites) make technical, ecological and social dimensions immediately tangible and provide a solid basis for informed local decision-making processes.

Low-threshold: No participation fees, simple registration and a heterogeneous participant structure (students, apprentices, voluntary ecological service participants, young professionals) ensure broad outreach and social diversity.

Participation and dialogue: Role-playing exercises, moderated discussions and pitches to political guests create genuine opportunities for participation and increase the legitimacy of local measures.

Career and networking impact: Workshops on wind energy, hydrogen, grids and operations, as well as insights into simulators and skilled trades, link education with labour market perspectives and support skills recruitment.

Multiplier effect: Documentation, alumni networks and follow-up formats ensure that impulses continue to have an impact within municipalities, associations and companies.

## Municipal workshop series

The municipal workshop series is a short digital format (2 hours) for public administrations and municipal decision-makers, implemented in cooperation with the Renewable Energy Agency (AEE). Its aim is to address current energy transition issues in a practice-oriented manner, provide rapid impulses for action and support local decision-making processes with expert knowledge and implementable recommendations. Typical outputs include presentation slides, concise recommendations for action and curated access to best-practice materials.

Digital workshops for municipalities should be designed to be short and concise. Two-hour formats offer a high degree of time efficiency and allow low-threshold participation without lengthy absences from the workplace, even for heavily burdened senior officials and department heads. The content focuses on locally applicable measures that can be directly integrated into municipal planning and decision-making processes. Cooperation with professionally recognised partners such as the Renewable Energy Agency (AEE) ensures scientifically sound and up-to-date content, while also increasing reach and credibility among administrations, municipal councils and local stakeholders. Live Q&A segments create space for addressing specific challenges, while the provision of materials such as presentation slides, toolkits and funding guidance support follow-up actions and facilitate immediate implementation on the ground (see Appendices 7.15 and 7.16).

The QLEE formats do not exist in isolation but form a permeable portfolio of offers: insights from stakeholder discussions feed into portal texts (Funding Compass, Renewable Energy Knowledge) and into the thematic selection of workshops. The digital energieXchange series serves as a low-threshold entry point, while introductory courses and in-person workshops deepen technical understanding and strengthen inter-institutional exchange. The Future Academy creates multipliers with long-term impact.



# 5. Transfer and internationalisation: impulses for further development

The QLEE qualification network has demonstrated how regional cooperation can contribute to securing skilled labour and shaping structural change. However, the challenges addressed by QLEE – such as restructuring energy supply, qualifying people for new technologies and activating regional potential – are not limited to Lusatia; they affect many regions in Europe and beyond. It is therefore worth broadening the perspective and understanding the QLEE approach as a model for international knowledge exchange and cooperation.

## Impulses from international exchange

During the project period, valuable encounters with international partners took place. Exchanges with **Studium Wodoru (Poland)** and **ECUK – Energetické centrum Ústeckého kraje (Czech Republic)**, as well as delegations from various countries, demonstrated strong interest in regional qualification networks. In discussions and workshops, core elements of QLEE were presented, such as the role of the lead company, regional networking and the practice-oriented development of training programmes. These formats not only increased the project's visibility but also opened up new perspectives.

## Why internationalisation matters

Internationalisation is not a mandatory component when establishing a qualification network, but it can represent a strategic extension. It promotes innovation through external impulses, strengthens the network's visibility and can contribute in the long term to the establishment of a European network. For decision-makers, it offers opportunities to learn from one another, identify shared challenges and develop solutions that extend beyond national borders.

## Formats for knowledge exchange and cooperation

Those wishing to further develop the QLEE approach can draw on various formats:

Delegation visits and job shadowing: enabling direct insights into the network's work.

Expert workshops and joint events: promoting exchange on specific topics such as hydrogen training or municipal participation.

Documentation of best practices: creating a basis for transferability of the model.

Partnerships with education and innovation networks: strengthening the European dimension and opening up new funding opportunities.



For anyone seeking to establish or further develop a qualification network, it is worth integrating international perspectives at an early stage – whether through targeted exchange, joint projects or strategic openness towards European networks. The QLEE approach provides a solid foundation for this and can serve as inspiration for similar initiatives.



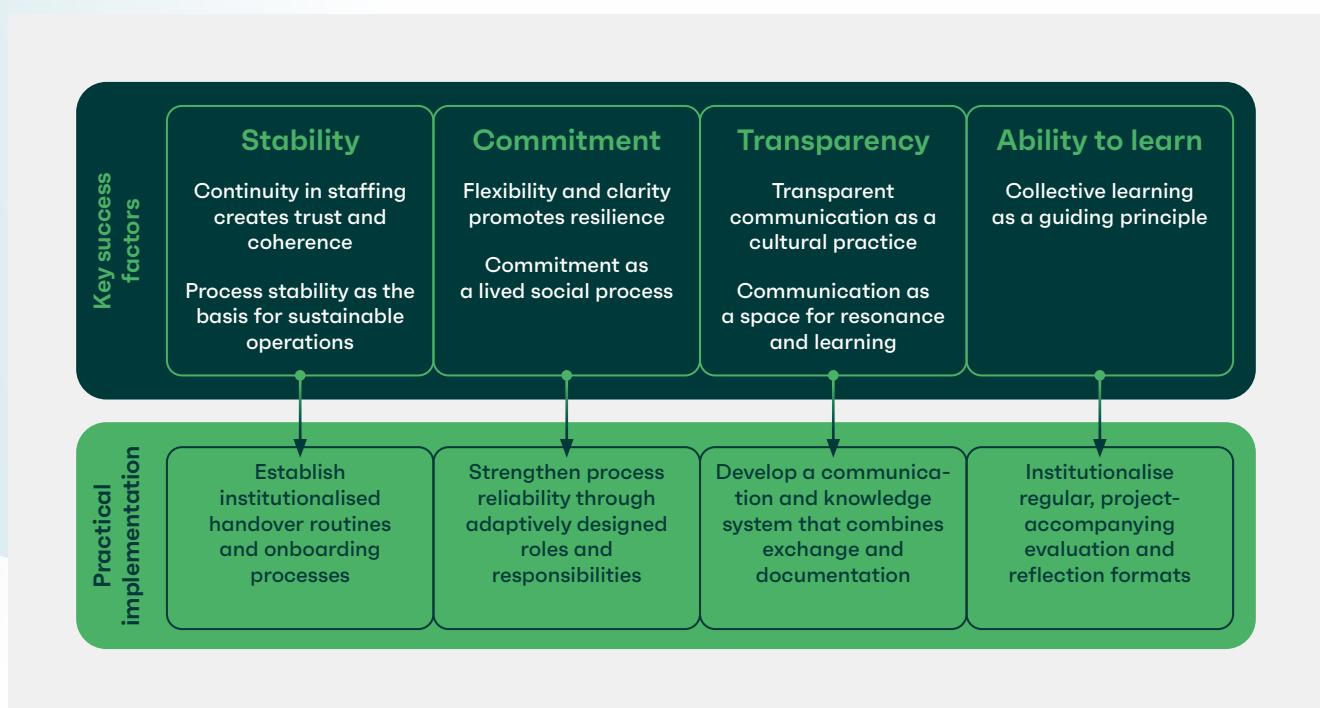


# 6. Lessons learned – prerequisites for successful collaboration within the network

In order to make both success factors and challenges in project collaboration comprehensible and thus enable knowledge exchange to other innovation and economic networks, collaboration, governance and implementation processes within the project were reflected upon and evaluated through guideline-based interviews with nine key project partners from the qualification network. The focus is therefore not on whether objectives were achieved, but on how they were achieved – and which structural, procedural and communicative conditions facilitated or hindered the project process.

The process evaluation of the QLEE network shows that successful content-related collaboration in cooperation-based projects does not depend solely on technical expertise; structures and processes in which collaboration is embedded are equally decisive. Before content can be jointly developed, framework conditions must be created that ensure constructive and sustainable cooperation.

Four aspects emerged as key prerequisites:



## Stability

In cooperative network structures such as QLEE, human resources form the central infrastructural basis for the capacity to act. Their significance extends beyond quantitative capacity and includes qualitative aspects such as the alignment of competencies, institutional anchoring of responsibilities and continuity.

The evaluation shows *"that it is extremely important in projects like this that the leading figures remain as consistent as possible"* (QUEE project management), and that overall personnel stability is a decisive factor for trust-based cooperation and, consequently, for the quality and coherence of network processes.

At the same time, personnel stability alone is not a sufficient criterion for sustainable project quality. Particularly in complex, multi-year collaborations, personnel configurations are naturally subject to change due to role changes, institutional restructuring or project extensions. What ultimately matters is therefore not the stability of individual people, but the stability of the processes in which knowledge, responsibility and decision-making logics are embedded.

A resilient network system is thus characterised by institutionalised communication, documentation and handover routines that can absorb personnel changes without disrupting core working relationships. When process stability is understood as a structural principle, staff turnover can even be used as an opportunity for development – for example, to integrate new perspectives or competencies. Sustainable project success therefore depends less on personnel continuity than on the ability to systematically organise institutional learning and knowledge exchange.

## Commitment as a prerequisite for dynamism and flexibility

Throughout QLEE, the high degree of flexibility among staff proved to be a key success factor. Tasks were distributed adaptively, priorities adjusted during the process and interfaces between partner institutions dynamically shaped. This pattern demonstrates a strong form of organisational resilience, understood as the ability to respond to external or internal changes through learning-oriented adaptation.

The resulting insight is that flexible task distribution should not be seen as a temporary workaround, but as a principle that can be structured. The prerequisite, however, is that this flexibility is underpinned by transparent communication, institutional feedback loops and binding agreements.

In cooperative structures, commitment constitutes the central translational function between planning and implementation. It arises where roles, decision-making pathways and responsibilities are not only defined, but are continuously reaffirmed through communicative and documentary practices.

Within the QLEE network, the interplay of governance, self-organisation and collective responsibility emerged as a key learning field. While traditional project architectures rely heavily on formal role assignments, this case shows that commitment must be understood as a social process – one that emerges in practice through continuous coordination, accountability and the visibility of responsibilities.

During the evaluation, it became clear that governance within the network does not follow a linear pattern but is shaped by situational demands. This adaptive governance – such as the formation of working groups (Continuing Training WG, Network WG, etc.) – proved conducive to learning, as it pools expertise and strengthens individual responsibility.

At the same time, adaptive governance requires a structured framework in order to anchor learning processes sustainably. Lessons from the first project phase demonstrate that internal governance mechanisms must be both formalised and participatory.

For further development, the implementation of a ‘reflexive and binding governance system’ is recommended, integrating three levels:

- 1. Formal level:** Clearly documented task and decision-making structures (task mapping, responsibilities).
- 2. Interactional level:** Regular reviews with feedback and adjustment mechanisms.
- 3. Learning-systemic level:** Institutionalised learning loops in which decisions and processes are regularly reflected upon and, where necessary, revised.

Commitment is thus understood not as control, but as communicative stability – a defining feature of learning-capable networks.

### Transparency as the basis for collective orientation

Transparency is a prerequisite for orientation, trust and self-regulation in inter-organisational network projects. It refers not only to the visibility of information, but also to the traceability of decisions and processes.

Within QLEE, a digital working space was established that provided the technical basis for collaborative work. However, the evaluation makes clear that transparency does not arise from digital infrastructure alone, but from its cultural embedding – through routines, binding standards and a shared ‘language’ of documentation and communication.

The project shows that hybrid working formats (digital and in-person formats) can generate a new quality of collaboration, particularly in transformation contexts. Quarterly in-person meetings complemented the online formats and proved to be productive spaces for synchronisation and deeper mutual understanding.

A fundamental learning principle can be derived from this experience: transparency requires rhythmic communication. Regularly recurring formats – both digital and physical – stabilise information flows, ensure the traceability of decisions and create shared knowledge.

### Learning capacity and communication as cross-cutting dimensions

One of the strongest insights from the first project phase concerns the role of reflexive in-person formats such as retreats or strategy meetings. These formats create collective ‘resonance spaces’ in which project experiences can be condensed, differences made visible and priorities realigned.

On this basis, cooperation in network projects should be understood as a continuous dialogue process – with fixed structures for meta-communication, i.e. for discussion about the collaboration itself.

The QLEE project experience highlights the relevance of a communication architecture that integrates exchange, reflection and governance. Specifically, the following elements have proven effective:

- » a regular format for collective feedback between operational and strategic levels
- » rotating moderation roles to promote shared responsibility
- » the introduction of collaborative tools for real-time documentation
- » a project-wide definition of responsibilities for information maintenance

## Conclusions and development impulses

The evaluation shows that QLEE is not merely a project in the narrow sense, but a learning organisational model within the context of regional transformation.

A central insight is that successful network-based collaboration depends less on traditional project logics (timeframes, budgets, milestones) than on institutionalised learning structures – namely the ability to continuously synchronise knowledge, roles and communication.

The following development impulses were identified as key:

- 1. Institutionalising learning loops:** Evaluation and reflection become permanent elements of project governance.
- 2. Strengthening process commitment:** Through formalised but adaptable role and task structures.
- 3. Communication and cooperation culture as a field of innovation:** Promoting dialogical competencies and shared interpretative frameworks through regular exchange formats.
- 4. Digital coherence:** Establishing an integrated communication and knowledge system that connects exchange and documentation.



The formative evaluation of QLEE shows that successful project work is anchored not only in outcomes, but above all in shared learning processes.

By consciously shaping commitment, transparency, cooperation and both personal and structural learning capacity, QLEE can serve as a blueprint for sustainable transformation networks.

# 7. Appendix

## 7.1 Onboarding process

### 1. Recruitment

#### **Initial conversation with interested parties at events/trade fairs, etc.**

- ↳ QLEE staff member informs the network manager about the conversation and forwards contact details.

### 2. Applying for membership

#### **Complete the online application form**

- ↳ New members complete the online form, which sends the data to the network manager by email (<https://qlee.eu/verbund/mitglied-werden>).

#### **Enter data into PDF form**

- ↳ The network manager manually enters the data received into the current version of the membership application form (PDF).

#### **Send PDF application form**

- ↳ The network manager sends the PDF form to the new members for signature and stamping.
- ↳ The network manager sends instructions for logging into the members' portal.

#### **Registration in the members' portal**

- ↳ New members register independently in the members' portal.

#### **Assignment to the correct areas**

- ↳ The network manager assigns the new members to the appropriate areas (spaces).

### 3. Confirming and managing membership

#### **Create a company folder for the new network member**

- ↳ The network manager creates a new folder in the project space.

#### **File the relevant documents**

- ↳ The network manager files the membership certificate in the company folder.
- ↳ The network manager also files all other relevant documentation for verification purposes (e.g. reports on company visits).

## 4. Onboarding (company visit / online meeting)

### **Presentation of the project**

- ↳ Explanation of the objectives and scope of the project.
- ↳ Discussion of expected outcomes and benefits for members.

### **Introduction of network members**

- ↳ Presentation of participating companies and their respective roles within the network.
- ↳ Opportunity for new members to ask questions and introduce themselves.

### **Introduction to the platform and members' area**

- ↳ Demonstration of the main features of the platform.
- ↳ Explanation of how members can access resources and exchange information.
- ↳ Discussion of company profile text and company logo for the website.

### **Introduction to the event management platform idloom**

- ↳ Overview of the idloom platform.
- ↳ Guidance on using the platform to book training courses and events.

### **Needs assessment process**

- ↳ Explanation of the process for identifying members' qualification and training needs.
- ↳ Discussion of needs assessment methods and the role of members in this process.

### **Booking process**

- ↳ Guidance on booking training programmes via the event management platform.
- ↳ Explanation of the various booking options and procedures.

### **Documentation**

- ↳ The network manager prepares a report on the company visit and files it in the company folder.

## 7.2 Checklist: competencies for network management

### Professional competencies

The following professional competencies are essential for network managers to contribute successfully to the development and further development of a qualification network:

- Communication skills
- Advisory skills
- Analytical thinking and action
- Willingness to innovate and embrace change
- Networking skills

### Social skills

These social skills are crucial for network managers to interact effectively with different stakeholders, build trust and promote a positive network identity:

- Empathy
- Communication skills
- Ability to cooperate
- Conflict resolution skills
- Flexibility and adaptability

### Methodological competencies

These methodological competencies are essential for network managers to plan, implement and evaluate qualification measures and network activities effectively:

- Conducting needs analyses
- Use of facilitation techniques
- Fostering creativity and innovation
- Self-organisation and time management skills
- Use of evaluation and feedback techniques

### Personal competencies

These personal competencies are essential for network managers to reflect on their own way of working, promote a positive working environment and support others in realising their potential:

- Self-reflection
- Self-motivation
- Self-leadership
- Self-confidence
- Personal responsibility

## 7.3 Checklist: increasing visibility – practical measures

- Maintain a website with up-to-date content and offers**
- Actively manage social media channels on a regular basis**
- Send newsletters with relevant information**
- Distribute flyers and brochures locally (e.g. in town halls, companies)**
- Publish press releases on events and successes**
- Be present at trade fairs and regional events**
- Tell success stories from the region (storytelling)**
- Actively involve multipliers (e.g. chambers, mayors)**
- Provide a communication kit for members and partners**
- Regularly review impact and adjust strategy**

## 7.4 Checklist: communications strategy for a qualification network

This checklist supports the development of a communications strategy for a network such as QLEE:

**Define objectives**

What should the communication achieve?

(e.g. awareness, participation, trust)

**Identify target groups**

Companies, municipalities, civil society actors, educational institutions, general public

**Formulate key messages**

What makes the network special?

What are the specific offers and benefits?

**Select suitable communication channels**

Website, social media, newsletter, flyers, press releases, events

**Involve multipliers**

Who are relevant regional stakeholders?

How can they support communication efforts?

**Define corporate design**

Consistent visual identity (logo, colours, fonts, imagery)

**Create materials and templates**

Text modules, presentations, flyers, press releases

**Clarify roles and responsibilities**

Who communicates what?

Who maintains which channels?

**Plan monitoring and evaluation**

Which key performance indicators will be tracked?

How will feedback be used?

## 7.5 Checklist: social media kit for events and campaigns

A social media kit provides guidance for promoting events or campaigns via partner organisations. It bundles all essential information, sample text, and graphic templates.

### 1. Provide essential event/campaign information, such as:

- Title of the event/campaign
- Date, time, location (digital/physical)
- Short, concise description
- Target group and key message
- Call to action (CTA): registration, participation, sharing, etc.
- contact or registration link
- brief information on the organisers, including a list of existing social media channels

### 2. Prepare graphic materials for major channels, such as:

- Event banner/teaser image
- Feed graphics and story formats (1:1, 4:5, 16:9, 9:16)
- Graphics should incorporate the organisation's key visual/corporate design elements and logos of participating organisations
- Where applicable, customisable graphics featuring key quotes or messages from speakers or other contributors

### 3. Provide text modules, such as:

- Short teaser text (1-2 sentences)
- Longer social media post (LinkedIn, Instagram)
- Where applicable, customisable text modules
- Hashtag list
- Organiser and partner tags

### 4. Consider technical elements, such as:

- Providing graphics and texts via a shared download folder (Drive, SharePoint, Dropbox)
- Clear file naming (e.g. 'Event\_Teaser\_1080x1080.png')
- Ensuring materials are up to date
- Where applicable, guidelines for logo and image use

## 7.6 Online introductory interview

### **Purpose: Clarify the objectives of our initial visit:**

- Get to know the company and liaison officer
- Build trust
- Establish a personal connection
- Discuss approaches for more in-depth analyses

### **Company – baseline stocktake of key data**

- Industry (products, markets)
- Number of employees
- Year founded
- Workforce: qualifications and age structure
- Apprenticeships/training: which apprenticeships are offered and in which roles
- Quality management, etc.

### **Company strategy/organisation**

- Vision, objectives, what is the current/next major growth area in the company?
- Organisation chart, management levels
- Work location and working hours
- Remuneration system (transparency)
- Where is your company today (what are the products and services)?
- Where do you see the company in 10 years?
- Which technologies will be used in the future?
- Which roles/positions will be affected by change?

### **Personnel planning/development**

- Responsibility
- Staffing plans/job descriptions
- Succession/cover arrangements
- Organisational structure
- Budgets
- Importance and types of further training
- Personnel planning
- Current HR and training challenges
- Collaboration with educational providers

## 7.7 Guided interview (semi-structured interview)

### 1. Company profile

- 1.1 Company
- 1.2 Joining the network
- 1.3 Preferred form of address (Mr/Ms/Other)
- 1.4 Academic title, if applicable
- 1.5 First name
- 1.6 Surname
- 1.7 Telephone
- 1.8 Mobile number
- 1.9 Email
- 1.10 Job title/function

### 2. Key questions

- 2.1 What can QLEE do for you?
- 2.2 What can you contribute to QLEE?

### 3. Key company data

- 3.1 Year founded: When was your company founded?
- 3.2 Ownership structure (please describe)
- 3.3 Is there a works council?
- 3.4 Other stakeholders

### 4. Personnel

- 4.1 Number of employees (estimate or average)
- 4.2 Qualifications: Do you mainly employ highly qualified specialists?
- 4.3 Age structure: What is the average age?
- 4.4 Training/apprenticeships in the company: Does your company provide vocational training?
- 4.5 Continuing training in the company: Does your company provide systematic continuing training?
- 4.6 Which training occupations in which workplace/job role?
- 4.7 Labour market for employees: Where do you find your skilled workers?
- 4.8 Labour market for workers: Where do you find unskilled workers?
- 4.9 Vacancies: Which positions are currently being advertised?

## 5. Strategy

- 5.1** Position in the market: Where do you currently see yourselves?
- 5.2** Vision and objectives: What is your guiding objective?
- 5.3** 5-year / 10-year projection: Where do you see yourselves in the future (realistically)?
- 5.4** Organisation chart and management levels: How many management levels do you have?
- 5.5** Corporate culture: Is there anything noteworthy?
- 5.6** Workplace and working hours: Do you all work on site at the same time or are you distributed in terms of location/time?
- 5.7** Remuneration system/transparency
- 5.8** Product diversification: Are you planning to enter new markets?
- 5.9** Internationalisation: Are you planning anything in this regard?

## 6. Workforce planning and development

- 6.1** Responsibility: Who is responsible for workforce development?
- 6.2** Staffing plans: Do you have anything of this nature?
- 6.3** Job descriptions: Do you have these and are they up to date?
- 6.4** Deputising/cover arrangements (job rotation): Are there rules for this? How do you handle it?
- 6.5** Importance and forms of continuing training: Please tell us about this
- 6.6** Workforce planning: How does workforce planning work in your company?
- 6.7** Organisational structure
- 6.8** Budgets
- 6.9** Current topics and challenges in HR work and continuing training
- 6.10** Collaboration with educational providers
- 6.11** Digitalisation strategy
- 6.12** New Work and working from home
- 6.13** Data protection and data security
- 6.14** Workforce diversity/minorities
- 6.15** Provision of employees (secondment)
- 6.16** Employment relationships

## 7. Technical development

- 7.1** Product development
- 7.2** Workplace development
- 7.3** Research and development
- 7.4** Digital corporate culture
- 7.5** Formal and informal skills requirements

## 8. Your markets and you

- 8.1** Industry
- 8.2** Products
- 8.3** Services
- 8.4** Sales markets
- 8.5** Upstream products and raw materials markets
- 8.6** Bull or bear market trends

## 9. Communication

- 9.1** Company website or particularly relevant page
- 9.2** LinkedIn profile, if available
- 9.3** Twitter account, if available
- 9.4** YouTube account, if available
- 9.5** Other channels, if available
- 9.6** Newsletter: Would you be interested?
- 9.7** Source of contact: How did you hear about us?



**Assess the delivery of the seminar content according to the following aspects:**

## Learning management system (Moodle)

**Which format would you have liked to have in addition (information, reading material in advance, links, etc.)?**

1. **What is the primary purpose of the study?** (10 points)

Break times	<input type="radio"/> too little	<input type="radio"/> just right	<input type="radio"/> too much
Homework	<input type="radio"/> too little	<input type="radio"/> just right	<input type="radio"/> too much
Reflection on what was learned (learning progress check)	<input type="radio"/> too little	<input type="radio"/> just right	<input type="radio"/> too much

## Rate the proportion of practical exercises.

too little       just right       too much

## Rate the proportion of theory.

too little       just right       too much

**Please rate the following aspects for each trainer:**

[Name of trainer #1]

[Name of trainer #2]

[Name of trainer #3]

[Name of trainer #4]

Rate the organisation of the seminar according to the following aspects:

## Accommodation

1    2    3    4    5    6

## Catering

1    2    3    4    5    6

## What else would you like to share with us?

1. **What is the primary purpose of the study?** (10 points)

2. **What are the key variables being studied, and how are they measured?** (10 points)

3. **What statistical methods are used to analyze the data, and what are the results?** (10 points)

4. **What are the conclusions drawn from the study, and what are the implications?** (10 points)

Thank you very much for taking part!

## 7.9 Checklist: participation formats for municipalities, civil society and young people

### 1. Identify and activate target groups

- Research relevant municipal actors (e.g. mayors, local administration, municipal networks such as the Lausitzrunde)
- Identify civil society organisations (e.g. sports clubs, fire brigades, neighbourhood initiatives, local associations)
- Target young people specifically (e.g. through schools, universities, youth associations, social media)
- Use personal outreach and local presence (e.g. at events, club evenings, youth centres)
- Build trust through transparent communication and clearly demonstrable benefits

### 2. Identify needs and develop tailored formats

- Conduct conversations with representatives of target groups (needs analysis, expectations, barriers)
- Consider existing structures and interests (e.g. topics already being discussed locally)
- Develop or adapt formats jointly with the target groups
- Create low-threshold access (e.g. plain language, flexible times, familiar locations)

### 3. Design participation formats

- Offer informational events on the energy transition, training opportunities and regional prospects
- Develop introductory courses on technologies such as photovoltaics, wind energy or hydrogen
- Create educational formats specifically for young people
- Integrate soft skills and future competencies (e.g. communication, teamwork, adaptability)
- Incorporate formats addressing populism and anti-democratic trends (e.g. dialogue workshops)

#### 4. Promote cooperation

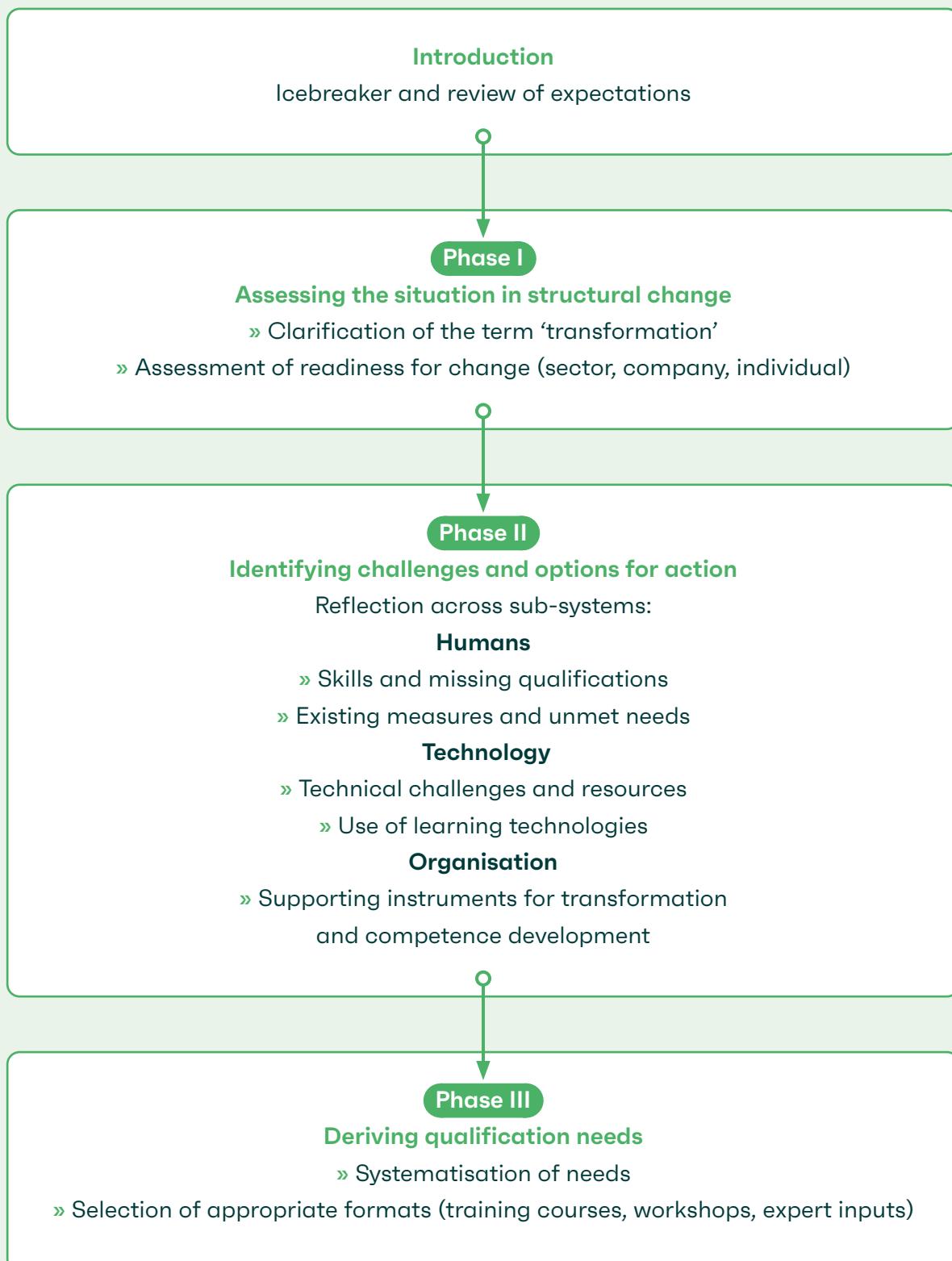
- Actively involve multipliers (e.g. city sports associations, fire brigades, municipal networks)
- Provide communication materials (flyers, presentations, text modules)
- Plan joint events or activities
- Make participation visible (e.g. through press work, social media, success stories)

#### 5. Safeguard impact and develop it further

- Obtain feedback from participants and partners
- Evaluate formats regularly and adapt them
- Document and share examples of success
- Understand participation as a continuous process, not a one-off measure

## 7.10 HTO analysis process

The **HTO analysis** is divided into three main phases, simplified in the following process model:



For a purposeful discussion, it is advantageous if several company representatives from different departments participate. This broadens the range of perspectives and can help uncover unexpected issues or previously unknown topics.

The benefits of this systematic approach for the member companies include:

- » a comprehensive analysis of transformation challenges,
- » concrete derivation of training measures,
- » opportunities for exchange with other companies and experts and
- » strengthening regional workforce security.

Moreover, applying the HTO approach offers potential in transformation processes and projects. What perspectives are needed in transformation for it to succeed?

Four guiding principles should be observed:

**Holistic approach:** Consider the entire work system, not only technical or personnel aspects.

**Participation:** Involve those affected in analysis, planning and implementation. Participation increases acceptance and improves outcomes.

**Reflection:** Understand changes as learning and development processes. Reflection loops and feedback processes support continuous improvement.

**Sustainability:** Solutions should be viable in the long term and enable future adjustments.

## 7.11 Introductory courses on renewable energy technologies: methodology and organisation

### Methodological recommendations:

- » Content, examples and language should be explicitly tailored to non-technical participants; technical depth should be included only where it is immediately relevant to practical application.
- » Participatory elements such as time for questions, moderated discussions and experience sharing promote the transfer of learning and increase acceptance.
- » The use of clear graphics, infographics and short regional project profiles makes complex interrelationships accessible.
- » For reuse and consistency, presentations and handouts should be based on standard templates and made available in an accessible format.

### Organisational recommendations:

- » QLEE members and regional practitioners can serve as speakers, intermediaries and door-openers to local networks.
- » Selecting easily accessible venues with suitable infrastructure increases willingness to participate and the quality of practical exercises.
- » A short survey combined with qualitative analysis provides immediate feedback for further development of the format.

## 7.12 energieXchange checklist: programme design and structure

### **Introduction and objectives (10 minutes):**

Welcome, brief contextualisation and expected takeaways.

### **Expert input (20-30 minutes):**

Evidence-based, concise input by experts or practitioners with a clear focus on practical relevance.

### **Practical examples (15-25 minutes):**

Short profiles of local projects or case studies showing concrete implementation steps and outcomes.

### **Moderated discussion and Q&A (30-40 minutes):**

Structured moderation, live questions from the audience and targeted responses to pre-submitted questions.

### **Outcome documentation and call to action (10-15 minutes):**

Clear recommendations for action, guidance on funding opportunities and links to further QLEE resources.

### **Follow-up:**

Provision of keynote slides, Q&A summary and resource package on the QLEE portal.

## 7.13 energieXchange: methodology and organisation

### Methodological recommendations:

- » Methodologically, it is advisable to tailor each session strictly to one field of action (e.g. community energy, land use, funding instruments, district heating networks).
- » Interactive elements such as live polls, chat moderation and breakout rooms enable deeper discussion of specific cases and actively involve participants.
- » A short pre-survey before the event collects specific questions and practical examples to ensure content is highly relevant.
- » Each session should end with clear outcomes, such as next steps, points of contact and links to useful tools or funding opportunities.
- » Recordings with subtitles and accessible materials should be provided for future use.

### Organisational recommendations:

- » Organisationally, early involvement of specialist partners and regional practitioners is important.
- » Experienced hosts manage discussion and timekeeping.
- » A stable technical platform is required, with chat, polling functions, breakout rooms, recording options and a download area. Standardised templates for keynote slides, Q&A summaries and download packages ensure recognisability.
- » A short evaluation directly after the session provides valuable input for planning future topics and supports the continuous improvement of energieXchange.

## 7.14 Future Academy: organisational recommendations for transferability

**Objective definition and partner mapping:** Define clear target groups, learning objectives and outcome indicators; involve local partners (companies, universities, administrations, NGOs, DGB (German Trade Union Confederation) structures) at an early stage.

**Modular programme blueprint:** 1 day introduction and context; 1 day technology and careers information; 1 excursion day; 1 day visioning and policy dialogue; conclusion with a participation certificate and concrete follow-up steps.

**Mix of methods:** Plan a combination of inputs, small-group simulations, hands-on workshops, excursions and creative moderation methods (e.g. Six Thinking Hats).

**Logistics and accessibility:** Provide travel support, flexible travel arrangements, buffer spots to offset no-shows, safety briefings for excursions and ensure accessibility.

**Communication:** Use local storytelling, social media kits, press outreach and a communications kit for multipliers (text modules, images, templates).

**Evaluation and sustainability:** Conduct on-site short surveys, post-event evaluations, document working group results in actionable guides; establish alumni structures for continuity.

## 7.15 Municipal workshop series: methodology and organisation

### **Methodological recommendations:**

- » Methodologically, a targeted advance survey is recommended. A short questionnaire to participants provides current challenges and case examples for tailored input.
- » During the session, interactive elements such as live polls, digital whiteboards or breakout sessions increase relevance and enable practical case work.
- » An automated follow-up package with summary, materials, points of contact and notes on relevant funding programmes ensures that insights are applied to processes.
- » Accessibility includes recordings with subtitles and accessible documents.

### **Organisational recommendations:**

- » Organisationaly, targeted outreach via relevant distribution lists is key: promotion in cooperation with municipal associations, economic development agencies and state-level bodies increases participation and local anchoring.
- » Stable technical platforms with breakout functionality and chat moderation are required. Professional moderators with thematic expertise should lead discussions and manage time.
- » Standardised presentation templates and central storage for best-practice materials support reuse and scalability.

## 7.16 Municipal workshop series checklist: programme design and structure

### **Welcome and objective (10 minutes):**

Brief introduction, aim of the session and expected takeaways.

### **Expert input (25-30 minutes):**

Concise, evidence-based presentation by experts or regional practitioners with a focus on actionable solutions.

### **Practical examples and best practices (20 minutes):**

Local projects or case studies showing concrete implementation steps and results.

### **Moderated Q&A phase (25-30 minutes):**

Targeted facilitation format with questions submitted in advance by municipalities and live questions; where applicable, breakout rooms for deeper discussion of specific topics.

### **Concrete recommendations for action and next steps (10-15 minutes):**

Checklist, points of contact, link package and notes on funding opportunities.

### **Conclusion and evaluation (5 minutes):**

Short survey on relevance, outstanding needs and desired topics for follow-up formats.

# Imprint

## Publisher:

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## Copyright:

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**Funding notice:** This publication was produced as part of the project ‘Qualification Network in Lusatia for Renewable Energies – QLEE’. The project is funded by the Federal Ministry for Economic Affairs and Energy on the basis of a decision by the German Bundestag within the framework of the STARK Directive, which supports projects aimed at strengthening structures in German coal-mining regions.

**Disclaimer:** The data and information contained in this handbook have been collected, checked and compiled to the best of our knowledge. Liability for incomplete or incorrect data, information and recommendations is excluded, unless these have been disseminated through gross negligence or intent.



**Initiators**



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Supported by:



Federal Ministry  
for Economic Affairs  
and Energy

on the basis of a decision  
by the German Bundestag

**QLEE supports Lusatia in its transformation into a forward-looking region for renewable energies—through specific training opportunities for the business community, tailor-made workshops for the administration, and information offerings and exchange formats for civil society.**

Find out more about our activities on our website, subscribe to our newsletter or YouTube channel, and follow us on LinkedIn.

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