



Final Report – Evaluation of the *Environment for Young Europeans* Website

Brussels, 8 September 2008

Volume I

Gellis Communications sprl
Communications Management & Advocacy
Rue des Echevins 80
B-1050 Brussels
www.gellis.com

Disclaimer

The views and comments expressed in this text are the responsibility of Gellis Communications and do not necessarily reflect the opinion of DG Environment.

Contents	Page
Final Report	
Executive Summary	4
1. Introduction	9
2. Overview of the strategy	18
3. Objectives of the website	21
4. Focus audience	30
5. Content	36
6. Structure	40
7. Tools and Features	44
8. Visual and Verbal Identity	51
9. Use and Promotion of the EYE website	54
10. Maintenance and Sustainability	57
11. Summary of the recommendations	60

Executive Summary

Introduction

In January 2008, Gellis Communications was contracted by the European Commission's DG Environment (DG ENV) to carry out an evaluation of its 'Environment for Young Europeans' (EYE) website. **The aim of the research and analysis was threefold.**

- To **collect the views of students and teachers on the current version of the website**
- To **assemble their ideas on how the European Commission could make better use of the Internet to communicate environmental issues to young audiences**
- To formulate **strategic recommendations for the development of a new EYE website in order to improve communication on environmental issues to identified target audiences across the EU.**

The EYE website was originally developed by DG ENV to **raise youth awareness of environmental issues**. Although it aims to be 'informative' before being 'educational' in the traditional sense, its main objective is essentially to assist with Environmental Education (EE). Apart from minor content updates, the website has not been significantly reviewed since its launch in 2002.

The evaluation of the website was carried out between February and June 2008, during which time two other reports were produced, the Interim and Mid-Term Reports, which have already been submitted to the European Commission. Those evaluation reports comprised findings made using several research tools:

- **Expert audit** of the website by online pedagogy professionals
- **Market analysis** – Digital mapping of the competitive environment of the website and covering 64 websites
- **Best Practice Analysis covering 7 cases**
- **10 Member State surveys** – online survey for 825 students from 11-16 years old and 100 teachers, 94 one-on-one qualitative interviews with teachers and 109 Focus groups with children.
- **Target Group Consultation** – large scale, online survey in the 10 Member States filled in by 501 teachers, youth workers and parents and 591 students from 11-16 years old, 62 one-on-one interviews with teachers in those States included in the initial sample designed to test the preliminary strategic guidelines drawn after the results of the MS surveys.

The Strategic recommendations presented in the following document were drawn from all these sources and aimed to assist DG ENV in identifying the optimal target groups, structure, content, tools and features to: meet the website's predefined communication objectives; establish the best ways to achieve them; and ensure the website's sustainability.

Strategy overview

The strategy is aligned with the new communication challenges foreseen for the EYE website. It aims to satisfy its users, improve its overall quality and content, and raise awareness of the website.

The three axes of this strategy are:

- the **primary strategic guidelines**: stress the need to clarify the website's role, identify its Focus Audience, and guarantee its usefulness;
- the **primary communication guidelines**: define the parameters for relevant content and an appealing structure, and propose appropriate tools and features with which to increase the website's attractiveness;
- the **primary implementation guidelines**, aim to raise the visibility of the EYE website and strengthen DG Environment's capacity to adapt to users' needs by establishing website monitoring procedures.

Communications objectives

The proposed strategy is designed for the EYE website to:

- provide added-value within the context of online environmental education;
- attain a high level of effectiveness and impact on its target audiences; and,
- secure a high level of recognition and visibility in the field of environmental education.

Focus Audience

The Contractor has identified the most cost-effective primary target groups for the EYE website in **early-to-late secondary school youths (aged 11–16), teachers, educators and youth workers**.

The target groups that make up this focus audience, whilst retaining their respective specificities, all display a critical quality necessary to building a common 'cross-target group platform':

- a significant **interest in environmental issues** (and therefore reasons to visit the website);
- the **capacity to help achieve the website's core objectives** and desired long term impact;
- a certain level of **homogeneity** (they share similar characteristics and needs, which makes it easier and less costly to target them); and
- **the highest dissemination potential** which would help **popularise the EYE** website (i.e. the capacity to act as multipliers by disseminating information about the site to those around them).

Secondary target groups were also identified. These comprise children aged eight to 11 years old and their parents.

Content

The website should offer **an attractive alternative to existing national and international resources by acting as an EU youth environmental portal, thereby filling gaps in the market and avoiding redundancies.**

In the Consultants' view this can be done by **providing links to useful, existing, online EE resources at local and international levels, as well as EU level information. Audiences should also be involved in the promotion of an EU environmental message by encouraging activism.** The website also ought to continue to **offer all information in the 23 EU languages.**

The Consultants recommend that the new website should **act as a repository of local resources** and be well-adapted to the specific needs of each local EE market. They also recommend that **user-generated content be encouraged, which would hopefully promote the exchange of Best Practice.** This would be achieved via specific features supporting a **more participative approach** as described below.

Structure

The Consultants concluded that, for the EYE website, the optimal structure would be that of a **web-portal**, as it guarantees:

- a **clear structure and/or straightforward menu**, which make it easy to find what users are looking for (e.g. on-site search engines, web portals, etc);
- **clearly classified, 'easy to find' content;**
- a **user-friendly layout and high level of interactivity** (e.g. games, possibility to communicate and post comments on the site, up/download content, etc.); and
- **easy-to-use navigation tools.**

Tools and Features

Carefully selected features on a webpage **serve both to attract target audiences and to ensure more effective communications between them and the site owner.**

The following table presents the Consultants' proposed mix of tools, i.e. tools chosen from those cited in the report that could be on the website from the very first stages of its launch

Proposed Combination of Tools and Features					
EU Added-Value	Awareness raising (related to support for learning activities)	Interactivity	Entertainment	Drive repeat traffic	User-friendliness
EU map of environmental issues by Member State	Library of links (user-generated content, use of 'rating and tagging' options)		Games (links to popular games on other websites)	'Topic of the month' rubric (which always announces next month's topic too)	Internal search engine
'How to' section	Digital library of photos and videos (content generated by users and external 'partners')			'Tell a friend' feature	Site map
EU calendar of environmental activities	Factsheets uploaded by teachers and students (content generated by users and external 'partners')			A mailing list for flash news about updates and info about new campaigns (mini version of the newsletter)	Expanded help section (optional: virtual tour of the site)
Tools to support exchange of good practice (see 'interactivity')	(Optional) Newsletters for teachers	Online meeting point (forum)	Small scale surveys/competitions (with prizes to win)		Easy access for those with disabilities
	Activity packs for leisure time			Environmental prize for most voted project	

Verbal and Visual Identity

In the Consultants' view, the **language and visual features** should ensure that the **first time user perceive the website as useful and easy to use**. They should be simple, easy-to-grasp and explain the basic concept of the site.

Moreover, the site's **visual identity should be distinctive, memorable and coherent** (i.e. more modern colours and layout). The **website name/branding should be easy to remember and 'catchy'**. There is no need to change the url because most users find websites via search engines. The **language selection should correspond to target groups' needs and preferences** (i.e. its tone should be more serious).

Finally, a **system to monitor new trends** should be set up and the content should be scrutinised regularly (and moderated when user-generated) in order to guarantee consistency and conformity with Verbal Visual Identity Guidelines.

Use and Promotion

The website should develop its own online promotion strategy. First of all, it should **capitalise on the existence of well-known, highly visited Environmental Education youth websites (online synergies strategy)**. Secondly, **educational portals, national and international EE websites often visited by teachers and students can be linked to the new EYE website**. Thirdly, EYE should **promote itself via the other Europa websites (DG EAC, etc.)**, while seeking the **endorsement of specific target groups and of other Commission Directorates-General**. Fourthly, it should **optimise the website's search engine indexation in all EU languages**. Fifthly, it should **promote the 'EYE project award for youth' and with it the sharing of good/best practices**. Finally, it should self-promote.

The offline promotion strategy activities include: **launching a campaign, raising awareness of the site within the EC and establishing partnerships with other actors / stakeholders in the field**.

Maintenance and Sustainability

Website **updates** should take place **at least twice a month and moderation of the user-generated content system should be very regular**. In general, the site should be **closely monitored and user-centric**.

A **Panel of Experts** should also be established to **monitor new trends and user behaviour on the site (using data traffic analysis)** and a **user-feedback system** should also be implemented, the **feedback from which should be carefully registered and acted upon**, in order for the site to remain **up-to-date and of interest to its target audiences**.

1. Introduction

This introductory chapter summarises the **objectives** and **background** of the evaluation of DG Environment's Environment for Young Europeans¹ website. It explains how the Mid-Term Report, the Target Group Consultation (Research Phase 2) and the Final Recommendations for the improvement of the EYE website, drawn from the results, help achieve these objectives. It also provides information on the **scope** and overall **structure** of this Final Report.

1.1. Objectives and tools of the assignment

1.1.1. Evaluation of the Environment for Young Europeans website

In January 2008, Gellis was contracted to carry out an evaluation of the Environment for Young Europeans (EYE) website of the European Commission's DG Environment (DG ENV). The objective of this assignment is to **provide DG ENV with strategic recommendations for the future of this website.**

The **aim of the research and analysis** was **threefold**:

- To **collect the views of students and teachers on the current version of the website;**
- To **assemble their ideas on how the European Commission could make better use of the Internet to communicate environmental issues to young audiences;**
- To formulate **strategic recommendations for the development of a new EYE website in order to improve communication on environmental issues to identified target groups.**

1.1.2. Background and context of the assignment

The **European Union**, particularly through the environmental and ecological programmes proposed by the European Commission (EC), plays a **major international role in environmental affairs and sustainable development.** It also recognises the significant **responsibility of schools** to raise awareness of environmental concerns amongst young people, and DG ENV originally developed the EYE website to support teachers and students in this process. However, apart from minor content updates, the site has not been significantly reviewed since its launch in 2002.

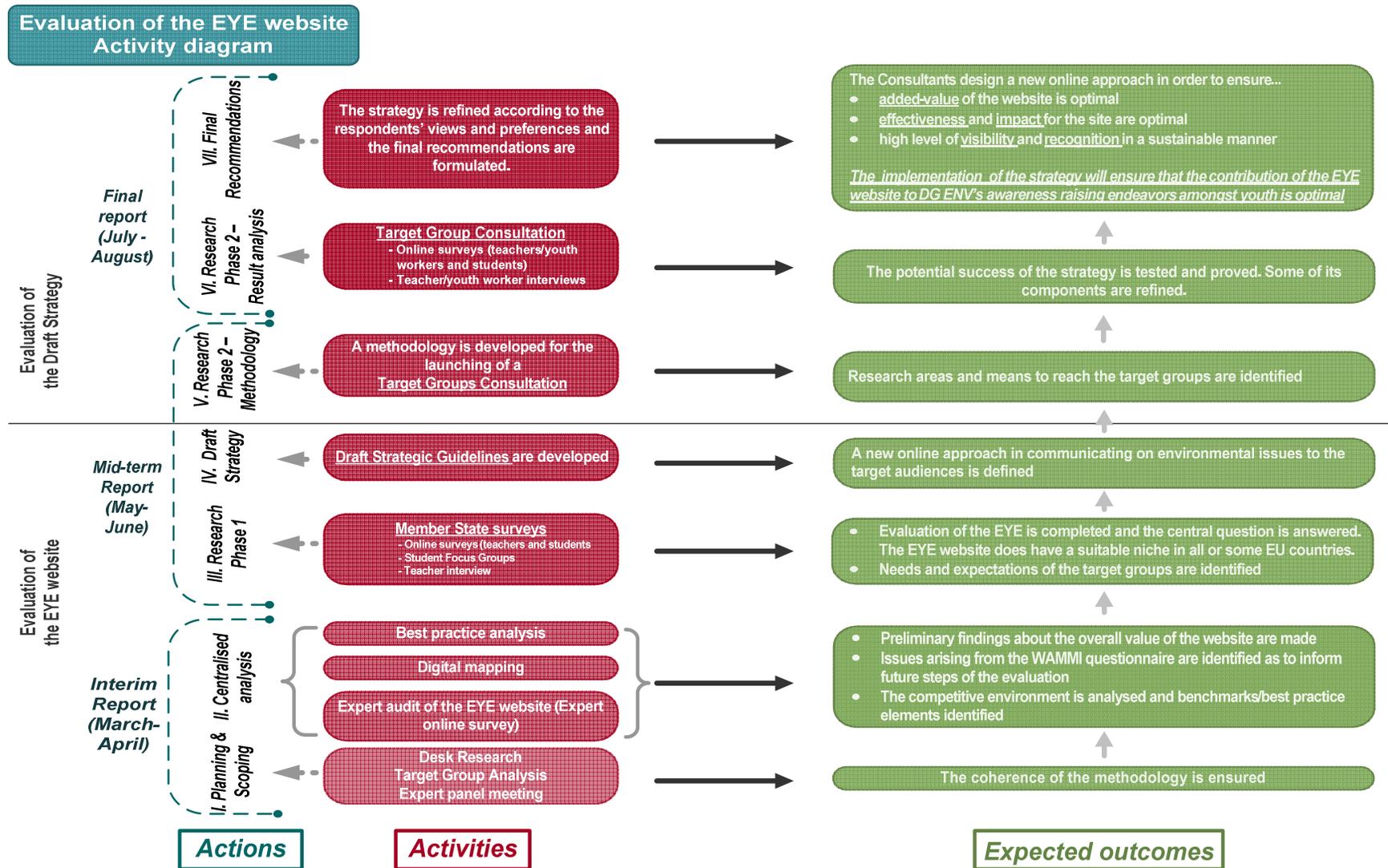
¹ <http://ec.europa.eu/environment/youth/>

The **objective of this website** is to incorporate the principles, values and practices of sustainable development into all aspects of education, as well as to provide a dynamic picture of the EC's involvement in that field. Although it aims to be 'informative' before being 'educational' in the traditional sense, its main objective remains very close to that of environmental education (EE). However, it is important to clarify that the Commission neither intends to become involved in the details of national education policies (by producing detailed EE teaching materials), nor to harmonise the education systems of Member States.

Accordingly, **the site's core objectives can be achieved in two ways:**

- The website could continue to try to fulfil its present objective (i.e. to educate by serving as a youth **EU informational website** about the environment); or
- The website could become a simple **web portal**, linking to other EU online resources and filling in the gaps where necessary.

The **various activities undertaken** in the context of this assignment are presented in the following (updated) diagram.



1.1.3. Scope

The research and evaluation carried out for the assignment sought to answer the following questions:

- Is a DG ENV EYE website still **relevant** or useful?
- What is the **added (European) value** of an EU site on Environmental Education compared to other available resources?
- Bearing in mind the current resources available, **who should be targeted**, under which structure and with what type of information?
- In what ways can visitors to the EYE website (i.e. teachers, students aged 11-16, parents, schools inspectors²) be turned into '**multipliers**'?
- What **marketing effort** can be proposed:
 - to encourage pedagogical use of the website?
 - to drive repeat traffic?
 - to create an online community?
 - to encourage the 'seeding', development and maintenance of networks?

These questions were answered thanks to a complete set of tasks and activities. The answers have been used to formulate the Final Recommendations for the website.

² More information on the target groups' choice can be found in the Section 4. Focus Audience.

1.1.4. Tools Used to Evaluate the EYE website

The evaluation of the EYE website required a complete set of tools and activities. As shown in the previous diagram, findings were presented to DG ENV in two separate reports (the Interim and Mid-Term Reports), prior to submission of the Final Report.

The following table presents the **list of tasks** (corresponding to *Action II* and *III* of the above diagram) **that have been undertaken for this exercise**, the **objectives** of these tasks and the **evaluation tools** that have been used to demonstrate the findings.

TOOLS EMPLOYED FOR THE EVALUATION OF THE ENVIRONMENT FOR YOUNG EUROPEANS WEBSITE		
Activity	Objectives	Toolbox
Expert audit of the EYE website	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Provide a preliminary evaluation of the level of relevance and user-friendliness of the website • Analyse the data traffic of the website • Identify strengths, weaknesses, opportunities and threats of/to the website • Improve the MS surveys using results of pilot questionnaires 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Gellis Expert Panel meeting (1) held on 20 February 2008 • Expert online survey of results based on pilot questions and responses • EUN³ Expert Group analysis • Data traffic on EYE and DG Environment websites in December 2007 and January 2008
Digital Mapping (Market Analysis)	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Provide an overview of the online Environmental Education (EE) market and the 'competitive environment' of the EYE website through analysis of EE online resources at national, EU and international level • Identify best practice websites in the 'youth information' sphere 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Desk research • Data collection (mainly through Internet search engines) – 64 websites were considered • Analysis of the websites using a set of research questions • Ranking of the websites according to a set methodology

³ www.europeanschoolnet.org

TOOLS EMPLOYED FOR THE EVALUATION OF THE ENVIRONMENT FOR YOUNG EUROPEANS WEBSITE		
Activity	Objectives	Toolbox
Best Practice Analysis	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Identify best practice elements to be discussed during the MS surveys 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Findings of the Digital Mapping: the highest ranking websites In-depth analysis of the best practice elements of the seven selected websites
Member State surveys (Research Phase 1)	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Draw further conclusions about the overall value of the website based on relevant questionnaires and verifiable sources Better identify the needs and expectations of the target groups Identify key issues and objectives for the new EYE website 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Online survey (1) involving 825 students between 11 and 16 years old and 100 teachers 94 one-on-one qualitative interviews with teachers 109 Focus groups with children Desk research

The complete findings drawn from the activities are presented in ***Annex I. Main findings of the evaluation phases.***

The evaluation of the website brought to light several of its shortcomings, but also highlighted some of its strong points. Above all, it **confirmed the continued need for such a site on the market of online environmental education resources** for the following reasons:

- There is a **niche on the market** for such a site:
 - in terms of EE resources, the online marketplace differs from country to country** and the EYE website can help provide access to the same minimal amount of necessary information in all EU countries, thanks to its optimal pan-European positioning;
 - the added-value of the EYE website on the market could be considerable, if it **focuses on developing its unique characteristics and multilingual nature;**
- DG ENV should continue with its mission to provide youths** with environmental information from an EU perspective, as websites can often explain these topics more vividly than books, retaining students' attention by making use of online pictures, animation, diagrams, and video clips, etc. In the sphere of environmental education, a website represents a good information flow, which can improve the two-way communication between teachers and their students, and among different educational actors;

- the **market analysis revealed a high level of interest of potential target groups in such a site**. Survey participants largely felt that its real added-value stemmed from its capacity to provide information on: EU environmental educational projects taking place all over Europe; EU environmental objectives; differences between countries' environmental legislation and specific issues.

As per the Terms of Reference, the **evaluation of the EYE website was followed by the design of a Draft Strategy**, which was in turn evaluated by the focus audience (i.e. all the target groups of the website). The Final Report presents the Final Recommendations for improvements to the EYE website, as well as the summary of the findings (in Annex).

1.1.5. Tools employed for the design of the Draft Strategy

As mentioned previously, the **final objective of the assignment was to provide strategic recommendations for the future EYE website and thereby improve DG ENV's communications to European youths**. A Draft Strategy was therefore designed on the basis of the findings made during the evaluation of the EYE website. This task corresponds to *Action IV* of the diagram.

TOOLS EMPLOYED FOR THE DESIGN OF THE STRATEGY		
Activity	Objectives	Toolbox
Definition of Strategic Guidelines	Define a new strategy for the EYE website - a new approach to communicating on environmental issues to the focus audiences	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • All findings made during the evaluation of the EYE website • Gellis Expert Panel meeting (2) held on 26 June 2008 • Desk research

The strategy is aligned with the new communication challenges foreseen for the EYE website. It aims to satisfy its users and improve its overall quality and content, while raising awareness of the website and its services.

The strategy follows three axes of approach:

- the **primary strategic guidelines** that stress the need to clarify the website's role, identify its focus audience and guarantee its usefulness;
- the **primary communication guidelines**, which plan to define relevant content, an appealing structure, appropriate tools and features with which to increase the website's attractiveness;
- the **primary implementation guidelines**, which aim to raise the visibility of the EYE website and strengthen DG Environment's capacity to adapt to users' needs by establishing website monitoring procedures.

In order to verify the validity of the strategy guidelines, a second Research phase was launched, the 'Target Group Consultation'. In this process the Consultants investigated key areas of concern and potential interest and formulated recommendations based on their findings.

1.1.6. Tools employed to evaluate the Draft Strategy (Target Group Consultation)

TOOLS EMPLOYED FOR THE EVALUATION OF THE DRAFT STRATEGY		
Activity	Objectives	Toolbox
Target Group Consultation	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Better identify the needs and expectations of the target groups by consulting them again • Confirm or amend the Draft Strategy Guidelines 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Online survey (2) for teachers, parents, youth workers and students (11-16) • One-on-one qualitative interviews with teachers • Expert Panel 2

The Target group Consultation provided more information on:

- the **general preferences, attitudes and claimed behaviour** of the target groups on the Internet;
- **questions related to the Draft Strategy Guidelines**, such as: the optimal positioning of the EYE website; its **structure** and **content**; attitudes towards the **tools** used to enhance **interactivity** on the website; **educational games** and user-friendliness issues;
- the **main differences and similarities between the target groups' preferences and needs**.

1.2. Structure of the Final Report

The Final Recommendations are based on:

- the Draft Strategy (drawn from the findings of the EYE website evaluation);
- the findings made during the evaluation of the Draft Strategy itself (Research Phase 2 – Target group consultation).

This report is made up of nine sections, each describing a different stage of development of the new EYE website:

1. **Overview of the final strategy:** describes the strategy developed to revamp the website. It is based on the Draft Strategy designed for the Mid-Term report and updated on the basis of the findings made during the evaluation of this document.
2. **Communications objectives:** describes the general and specific objectives of the new strategy for the website and applies the SMART method⁴ – according to which objectives must be Specific, Measurable, Achievable, Relevant and Time-bound.
3. **Focus audience:** determines which user groups we believe ought to be targeted by the EYE website, based on criteria which should ensure that the new site achieves its objectives.
4. **Content:** determines the type of information which should be offered on the website.
5. **Structure:** determines the optimal format for the website.
6. **Tools and Features** (functionalities): describes the type of tools and activities the website should offer.
7. **Visual and Verbal Identity:** describes the issues which should be taken into account during the development of the website in order for it to be more attractive/consistent for its focus audience.
8. **Use and Promotion:** describes the possible activities which could be conducted by DG ENV (or its sub-contractor) to promote the website and make effective use of it.
9. **Maintenance/Sustainability:** describes various ways of ‘keeping the website alive’ in the long run.

A **summary of the recommendations** is presented at the end of the document, providing a complete overview of the strategic activities to be undertaken to improve the overall effectiveness of the website.

⁴ SMART is a mnemonic used in project management at the project objective setting stage. It is a way of evaluating if the objectives that are being set are appropriate for the individual project. A SMART objective is one that is Specific, Measurable, Achievable, Relevant and Time-bound. R may also stand for ‘Realistic’.

2. Overview of the strategy

This section provides **guidelines to improve the *relevance* and *effectiveness*, and ensure the *sustainability*⁵ of DG ENV's communication to youth** through its Environment for Young Europeans (EYE) website. The Consultant has chosen to present the overview of the strategy under the form of Strategic Guidelines. They are categorised as **strategic, communicational** or '**implementation related**' as this approach helps to ensure the overall ***relevance*, *effectiveness* and *sustainability*** of the new strategy. These guidelines have first been presented as part of a (Draft) Strategy by the Consultant in a previous document called *Mid-Term Report for the Evaluation of the Environment for Young Europeans Website*. As mentioned previously, this draft strategy has now been finalised thanks to the findings made during Research Phase 2 (Target Group Consultation).

The aim of these guidelines is to **clarify which areas of the EYE website require (most urgent) improvement**. They do not aim to present a step-by-step communication plan, but instead serve to provide a presentation of the general focus of the Consultant's Final Recommendations.

Essentially, the strategy aims to facilitate the role of the EYE website to act as a conduit to and **amongst the various significant international, EU, national and even local level actors** in the field of Environmental Education, thereby helping meet demands of the site by both teachers and students.

The new EYE site would therefore act as a '**bridge**' – **bringing together diverse sources of environmental information and concepts into one single, public website**, to include:

- **offline and online communications** of DG ENV
- useful **environmental documents, projects and guidelines**. For instance, the EYE website could present environmental initiatives of other Directorates-General, such as the Sustainable Energy Week of DG Energy and Transport, or related discussion topics on the European Youth Portal
- an uploadable database of **national and local environmental education resources** available from different EU Member States
- **information from students/teachers/educators from different Member States** (intended to raise awareness and improve cooperation on environmental projects, etc.)
- environmental **discussion forums** for both students and teachers⁶
- **local/national eco-news links** (by country) which students could associate with their daily lives⁷
- **eco-news** / information which helps explain global environmental phenomena
- **environmental fun and games** (to encourage youth eco-learning across the EU)

A wider perspective should be adopted for the development of the long-term strategy of the website, including for instance the **Lisbon Strategy goals** and the **Life-Long Learning skills schemes**.

⁵ Sustainability in this context refers to capability of the website of being maintained up-to-date in an optimal and effective way.

⁶ Please refer to the forums presented on the European Youth Portal (<http://europa.eu/youth/>) to see examples of topical discussion forums.

⁷ These links could be added on the website by the users themselves.

The Consultant has chosen to categorise the 10 Guidelines as **strategic, communicational** or **'implementation related'**:

Primary strategic guidelines ("Think"):

The overall strategy of the EYE website has to fulfil a set of criteria which will help ensure its continued **relevance**. It must:

1. **Clarify the website's role** as a 'bridge' and a powerful, environmental EU communications tool, by defining its:
 - **Mission statement** – This will be a *clear, brief* explanation of the website's purpose.
 - **Communication objectives** – These objectives will need to be **Specific, Measurable, Attainable, Relevant** and **Time-bound (SMART)**. Please refer to **Section 3. Objectives** for more details.
 - **Main messages**
2. Identify **priority target audiences**
3. **Guarantee the website's usefulness**, by:
 - Meeting the predefined **target groups' needs and expectations**, as identified during Research Phases 1 and 2.
 - Re-focussing on the **website's real 'added-value'** – its European character.
 - Making better use of **existing resources**

Primary communications guidelines ("Do"):

The website should be developed with a view to being **effective**. It should therefore:

4. **Promote and facilitate the exchange of knowledge and 'good practice'**.
5. Provide **less information of a general nature and focus on information that is usable in learning contexts** or during **leisure time**.
6. Develop a **structure that will appeal to primary target audiences**, without discouraging secondary ones.
7. Develop and provide the **most effective and appropriate tools** for an Environmental Education website
8. Develop appropriate features to increase the overall **attractiveness** and **user-friendliness** of the website

Primary implementation guidelines (“How”)

Make use of the available communications tools with a view to ensure the **sustainability** of the website:

9. **Raise the visibility of the website** with improved indexation, branding and development of synergies as well as by securing endorsements
10. **Strengthen monitoring procedures** and set up a mechanism to adapt to Internet trends and/or user-feedback

3. Objectives of the website

A clear differentiation should be made between a **goal** (which communicates an overarching vision) and the **objectives** (which articulate specific and measurable targets) for a website.

Long term goal of the EYE website

The goal of the EYE website is not only to **raise awareness on environmental issues amongst youth**, but for it to **embrace the European green agenda** in a visible and measurable manner.

This overarching goal can be achieved only if youth and other intended targets adhere to the following paradigm:

- **Know** – Youth personal awareness of and connection to the environment are developed.
- **Believe** – Environmental concepts are integrated in the lives of European youth.
- **Act** – Youth are able to act responsibly, participating in the implementation of the best solutions to environmental problems.

For the EYE website to **contribute** to the achievement of this overarching goal as well as to **DG Environment's awareness raising endeavours** in general, it ought to be **relevant, efficient** and maintained in an **effective** and **sustainable** manner. It will therefore need to set some objectives for itself and refer to them at each stage of its development.

Strategic objectives of the EYE website

In the Consultant's view, there are **three main objectives** that should be met for the EYE website:

- exemplify a **real added-value** within the context of online environmental education;
- reach a **high level of effectiveness** and **impact** on its target audiences; and,
- achieve a **high level of recognition** and visibility in the sphere of environmental education

Each of the above can be broken down into **one or more specific objectives** which will be met via a set of **targeted activities**. The details of these activities will be provided in the sections relevant to their specific nature (please refer to the Summary of Content for an overview of the organisation of the document). An **Objective Tree** also provides a schematic representation of these objectives and their related activities.

A way to ensure that objectives are realistic is to confront them with the SMART methodology. Therefore, **each specific objective will be Specific, Measurable, Attainable, Relevant and Time-bound (SMART).**

Remark about the timeframe

The following analysis is based on the time of launching of the improved EYE website which is referred to as time T. Each unit refers to one year. Therefore T+1 means the objective can be reached one year after the launch of the improved website. T+ 0.5 as a consequence refers to a period of six months.

General Objective 1: Exemplify a real added-value within the context of online environmental education (the added-value is immediately apparent)

This general objective implies that the website **plays a role** in that sphere and **brings new elements** to it thanks to its optimal positioning. General Objective 1 is related to the **level of relevance of the website**. It can be attained through the completion of one specific objective.

Specific Objective A: To reinforce the website's optimal positioning as an EU youth environmental portal by focusing on its unique characteristics as a pan-European and multilingual website.

Specific Objective A	S	M	A	R	T
To reinforce the website's optimal positioning by focusing on its unique characteristics as a pan-European and multilingual website	✓	✓ - Traffic data analysis (are the visitors consulting information on which EYE offers an EU added value) - Other EE websites link into the EYE website	✓ - Use of existing resources (no content development costs) - Topicality - Expressed needs from the target groups	✓ - Research-based (please refer to the findings of the Evaluation of the EYE website)	✓ Starting from time T

Examples of activities that can be conducted to meet **Specific Objective A:**

- define and promote a European environmental message
- produce a target group analysis
- define a market strategy which focuses on the European added value
- develop EU-specific content (news, information about projects, present conflicting views, etc.)
- prepare a glossary of common terms found on the site to ensure consistency in the translations

General Objective 2: Reach a high level of effectiveness and impact

This objective entails that the website should provide **less general information and focus on information and tools that are useful, usable, 'sharable' and attractive** for the target groups. General Objective 2 is related to the overall **effectiveness** of the website.

Specific Objective B: Promote and support Europe-wide interaction amongst website visitors and the formation of clusters and networks.

Specific objective B	S	M	A	R	T
Promote and support Europe-wide interaction amongst website visitors and the formation of clusters and networks.	✓	✓ - Traffic data analysis (use of the mechanisms set up for the completion of this objective)	✓ - Already existing information - Small set-up and updating costs - User generated content	✓ - Research-based (please refer to the findings of the Evaluation of the EYE website)	✓ From T+ 0.5

Examples of activities that can be conducted to meet Specific Objective B:

- develop mechanisms to organise a structured exchange of information and Good Practice among users such as a topical forum for instance.
- promote online and offline the activities reported on the EYE website
- create a 'Best of Environmental Education' project award
- offer a European environmental events calendar (publication of networking opportunities in the sphere on the website)

Specific Objective C: To provide target audiences with information on a range of subjects and varying level of complexity that they can use in a learning context.

Specific Objective C	S	M	A	R	T
To provide target audiences with information on a range of subjects and varying level of complexity that they can use in a learning context.	✓	✓ - Traffic data analysis (number and nature of downloads from the website, etc.)	✓ - Topicality - User (teacher) generated content	✓ - Research-based (please refer to the findings of the Evaluation of the EYE website)	✓ T+ 1

In order to meet **Specific Objective C**, the **content of the website should be:**

- ready-to-use,
- easy to find – classified by level of proficiency,
- adapted to formal and/or informal learning activities, and
- focused on topics that are useful for teachers/educators to support their classes/activities and that fill in gaps on the online EE market.

Examples of material that can be used in a learning context⁸:

- fact sheets for students,
- pictures/videos explaining environmental related concepts presented by celebrities or scientists,
- ideas for leisure time or informal learning contexts,
- lesson plans

Specific Objective D: To facilitate and encourage the sharing of information amongst users of the website as well as the dissemination of information to potential secondary target groups with the help of appropriate tools and incentives.

Specific objective D	S	M	A	R	T
To facilitate and encourage the sharing of information amongst users of the website as well as its dissemination to new groups by providing them with the most appropriate tools and incentives to do so.	✓	✓ - Traffic data analysis (are the visitors interacting and sharing links, recommending the site, etc.)	✓ - Topicality - Target groups are accustomed to share and disseminate information online	✓ - Research-based (please refer to the findings of the Evaluation of the EYE website)	✓ T

Examples of activities that can be conducted to meet **Specific Objective D**:

- develop tools allowing a high level of **interactivity** with and on the website
- encourage users to **upload content** on the site
- offer features allowing the **classification and rating of the material** to facilitate the search for information on the site
- develop mechanisms to **involve the audience** (surveys)
- give **incentives** to students that participate in a specific poll or study for instance

⁸ More information on how this content can be added on the website with minimum involvement from DG ENV will be provided in the Section: Content of the Recommendations.

Specific Objective E: To develop visual and verbal identity guidelines (VVI) as well as appropriate features to enhance the level of user-friendliness of the site, in order to attract and engage with youth and teacher audiences.

Specific Objective E	S	M	A	R	T
To develop a visual and verbal identity as well as appropriate features to enhance the level of user-friendliness of the site, in order to attract and engage with youth and teacher audiences.	✓	✓ - Traffic data analysis (are the visitors attracted to the website and using it to its full potential, etc.) - User feedback	✓ - Sufficient resources to develop a new structure for the site as well as user-friendliness features and a new VVI (no important maintenance costs)	✓ - Research-based (please refer to the findings of the Evaluation of the EYE website)	✓ T

Examples of activities to **increase the overall attractiveness** and **user-friendliness** of the website, thereby meeting **Specific Objective E**:

- develop a **simple and neutral** (not young child-specific) **layout** that is attractive to multiple target audiences
- include an internal **search engine, a site map, bookmarking options**, etc.
- use a **simple**, easy to grasp, but not infantile **language**
- develop a **new branding** for the site
- **link to entertaining activities**, such as environment-related games, to attract the youth

General Objective 3: Achieve and maintain a high level of sector recognition, visibility and repeat traffic

One year after its re-launch, the website should be **positioned as a reference point** for information about environmental projects for European youth and teachers as well as a useful portal to environmental resources in Europe. General Objective 3 is related to the overall '**sustainability**' (which includes optimal efficiency) **of the website**.

Specific Objective F: To raise the visibility of the website with improved indexation, branding and development of synergies as well as by securing endorsements.

Specific Objective F	S	M	A	R	T
To raise the visibility of the website with improved indexation, branding and development of synergies as well as by securing endorsements.	✓	✓ - Traffic data analysis (amount of traffic in all languages) - Other DGs use the website to promote their own environmental related activities - Other EE websites link into the EYE websites	✓ - Small launching costs for indexation and new branding - Topicality - Content generated by other DGs or websites	✓ - Research-based (please refer to the findings of the Evaluation of the EYE website)	✓ T+ 0.5

Examples of activities that can be conducted to raise the visibility of the website, thereby meeting **Specific Objective F:**

- **market and promote** the website
- capitalise on the existence of well-known, highly visited Environmental Education youth websites (online synergies strategy)
- make use of the **endorsement** potential from specific target groups as well as other Commission Directorates-General.
- carry out a **campaign** for the launch of the redeveloped EYE website
- involve and be a **partner** of other actors / stakeholders in the field of EE in Europe
- develop tools allowing the **target groups to promote the website** in their community

Specific Objective G: To set up monitoring procedures for the traffic and user-feedback, as well as the mechanisms to take into account and adapt the features of the website accordingly.

Specific Objective G	S	M	A	R	T
To set up monitoring procedures for the traffic and user-feedback and mechanisms to react to issues brought up thanks to these procedures.	✓	✓ - Traffic data analysis - Yearly panel of experts - User-feedback	✓ - Traffic data tools - Yearly panel of experts	✓ - Research-based (please refer to the findings of the Evaluation of the EYE website)	✓ From time T

Example of activities that can be conducted to meet **Specific Objective G:**

- develop **mechanisms to organise a structured monitoring** as well as qualitative analysis of the results
- carry out regular **traffic data analysis**
- collect **user feedback**
- **update the website** for it to remain appealing to its target groups

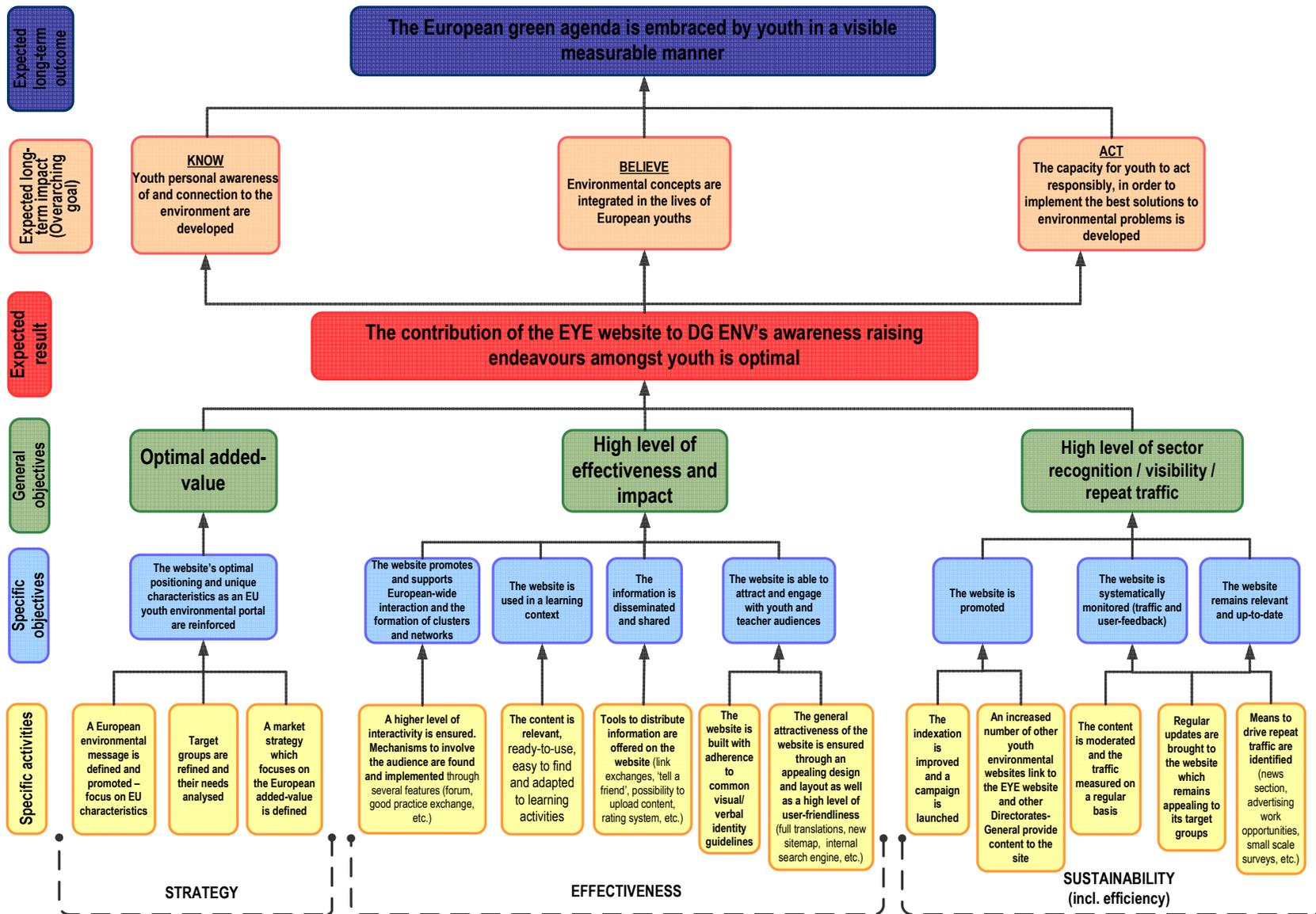
Specific Objective H: To set up a mechanism to adapt to Internet trends and new user needs in terms of content in order to remain up-to-date and relevant in its sphere as well as to drive repeat traffic.

Specific Objective H	S	M	A	R	T
To set up a mechanism to adapt to Internet trends and new user needs in terms of content in order to remain up-to-date and relevant in its sphere as well as drive repeat traffic.	✓	✓ - Traffic data analysis - Yearly panel of experts - User-feedback	✓ - Yearly panel of experts - User generated content (constant addition of new content keeps the website up-to-date)	✓ - Research-based (please refer to the findings of the Evaluation of the EYE website)	✓ T

Examples of activities to remain relevant and up-to-date and thereby meet **Specific Objective G**:

- provide a **facility for users to upload new content**
- convene a **yearly meeting with Experts** in order to assess the level of topicality of the site (meaning how up-to-date it is) and provide strategic recommendations
- update site with new EU related information on a bi-monthly basis

The following diagram provides a graphical representation of the above mentioned objectives.



4. Focus Audience

The identification of the Focus Audience of the site (the specific target groups it wishes to attract) **and its specific needs to take place prior to the re-definition of all components of the site.** As per the introductory briefing to the Consultant, the main goal of the site is to **raise awareness of environmental issues amongst youth aged six to 16 years.** The obvious **'potential target groups'** of the site are therefore **pupils in this age range.** However, **other groups of users can also fall in this category** if they are believed to be able to help achieve the site's main objective; **they are so-called potential multipliers.**

The Evaluation Phase has revealed the **following likely categories of site users**⁹:

- children from **six to 10 years old**¹⁰
- students from **11 to 14 years old**
- **students from 15 to 16 years old**
- **teachers and educators**¹¹ of / **youth workers dealing with students aged six to 16 years old**
- **parents**

However, the Evaluation Phase demonstrated **that a single website cannot successfully meet the demands of all these groups simultaneously**, or retain them all as regular users by applying the same tone-content-structure-layout formula.

In order to address this issue, **the website has three options:**

1. **To prioritise one target group** and develop the entire site in line with the needs and preferences of this specific group. However, this approach would limit the site's dissemination potential to the audiences the selected group has access to, e.g. teachers only disseminate in classes and to their peers, the six to 10 years olds are only likely to mention the site to their parents, etc.
2. **To adapt content and design** to the distinct needs, expectations and preferences of **each different user group** (i.e. develop **separate platforms / site sections for each age group or level of 'environmental literacy'**).¹² This option could be very expensive as it implies multiplying each development cost by the number of identified target groups.¹³

⁹ Please refer to 'Main findings of the Target Group Analysis' for more details (Annex I).

¹⁰ **This target group was established in line with those of the best practice websites identified during the Market Analysis** for the First Interim Report of the project (Please refer to 'Annex I. Summary of the evaluation phases' to find out more about the findings made during this exercise). These sites usually address children of this age group simultaneously, despite big differences in their reading skills and levels of computer literacy.

¹¹ The word 'educator' refers to persons or organisations which can have an impact/influence on youth education in the framework of informal educational activities.

¹² Our market analysis showed that the most successful websites on youth environmental education are very well targeted to specific age groups. These websites tend not to target young children and youths simultaneously. *National Geographic* offers different websites for older and younger children (<http://kids.nationalgeographic.com>), the UNEP *Tunza* website also has two different platforms for its distinct Focus Audiences, one for children and one for youths, and these groups are immediately divided up on the front page of the website (<http://www.unep.org/Tunza>). The *Défi pour la Terre / Challenge for Earth* website does not separate younger and older visitors to the site and this lack of separation could be seen as problematic, as the cartoons and video clips on the site seem to be aimed at younger children, whilst the written content seems to be designed for older youths (<http://www.defipourlaterre.org>).

¹³ Please refer to *Section 6. Structure* for more details.

3. To compose a larger '**Focus Audience**', which will encompass several target groups with common characteristics, and **develop a 'cross-target group platform'** that appeals to all the chosen target groups. Whilst this approach might exclude some of the site's previous sub targets, it also has the benefit of appealing to the broadest possible number of users.

The Consultants believe that, of the three options, **the third offers the greatest potential for success in the context of the EYE website**, as it is the most realistically attainable:

- It can be developed at **lower cost** than option two.
- It offers a **larger outreach** than option one.

The Consultant therefore believes that the **optimal solution would be to define a wide Focus Audience**, composed of several smaller target groups. This solution will **require lesser resources** for website development and maintenance, and is therefore feasible, even if DG ENV only decided to allocate limited resources to the development of the website.¹⁴

In order to **establish the optimal target group combination** for this Focus Audience, the target groups should be analysed through the prism of a **common set of criteria**. Those with most similarities will be eligible to become a part of the primary Focus Audience.

The **criteria** that should be fulfilled **by each of the target groups** are the following:

- a significant **interest in environmental issues** (and therefore reasons to visit the website);
- the **capacity to help achieve the website's core objectives** and desired long term impact;
- a certain level of **homogeneity** (share similar characteristics and needs), which makes it easier and less costly to target them; and
- **the highest dissemination potential, in order to popularise the EYE website** (i.e. the capacity to act as multipliers by disseminating information about the site in their surroundings).

According to the findings of the Evaluation Phase of the project¹⁵, **students aged 11-14, 15-16, teachers and educators/youth workers** are the groups whose environmental interests and Internet preferences can be most easily and effectively combined. They predominantly demonstrate a high level of interest in environmental issues and our research revealed an unmet need for more information. They even showed **interest in the same**:

- **topics** (Research Phase 2 showed that the three groups were interested in having access to information on: environment and health, climate change, waste, energy-related problems, biodiversity, etc.)
- **tools** (digital library, database of links, map of environmental problems in Europe, etc.)
- **features** (environmental news, examples of good practice, factsheets and lesson scripts, etc.)

¹⁴ The Consultant had no indication of the budget available for the development of the new website at the time these recommendations were formulated.

¹⁵ Please refer to Annex I – Main findings of the Evaluation Phase of the Project

The findings from the Target Group Consultation clearly demonstrated the feasibility of this combination as most teachers claimed to also visit educational websites aimed at younger user groups. They also pointed out that they considered websites such as Wikipedia, or open educational resources, more useful than those designed only for teachers, as they are aimed at both target groups, thus spanning a wider area of educational influence. Essentially, teachers believe that by targeting both audiences the site would increase the scope, detail and hence the value of its resources to a wider range of users. They also felt that by reviewing content targeted at students they are better able to understand their students' perspective on key issues, which in turn helps them prepare class work and other professional duties more effectively.

What is more, these groups could be very effective multipliers – 11-16 year olds share their preferences with their peers, while teachers have the capacity to reach many students at one time.

The optimal Focus Audience of the EYE website is therefore composed of the following target groups:

- teachers/educators/youth workers
- students aged 11-14
- students aged 15-16

In the light of related findings, some target groups appear less cost-efficient to be addressed than others. These could therefore be considered **potential 'secondary' targets** only. They include:

- **Younger children (six–11)**

Reasons:

- Their **educational needs are the most specific.**
- They will **not be able to ensure an immediate multiplier effect.**
- They would **be less sensitive to the main goal of the website**, which is to inspire youths to take action on environmental issues.

- **Parents**

Reasons:

- **Difficult to be certain** that they would be consistent in their educational efforts.
- They have a very **limited capacity to ensure the optimal rate of dissemination** of information about the website.

Parents, however, are likely to make use of the website if it provides '**Environmental education tips for parents**'. They are not very often targeted via the Internet, even though they have the power to play a very important role in a young child's environmental education.

Finally the website could also strive to reach another, less obvious group, which could greatly help popularise the EYE website: the **school inspectors**. According to our Expert Panel participants, teachers make particular use of online educational resources if they fall under the scope of the school curriculum. The **inspectors' endorsement of the website could therefore have a positive impact** on the overall number and frequency of (repeat) visits by both teachers and students to the site. The Consultant recommends that their **endorsement be sought during the launch of the improved EYE website**, when they could become one of the key targets of the campaign.¹⁶ They would be informed about the existence of the EYE website, its main objectives and how it can be used by teachers in a learning context.

➤ **Why are the teachers/youth workers and students aged 11-16 the optimal target groups for the site? How do the site's main objectives correspond to their (EE-related) needs?**

In order to **confirm that the chosen groups would be most interested in what the site can offer**, their **needs and expected behaviours should be analysed in relation to the general objectives of the site**.

The site's optimal target groups are those which will be able to recognise and benefit from its added value ...

...because they need/are interested in the specific resources and services it can provide as a European environmental portal.

In the Consultant's view, the users who would **be able to immediately recognise the added value of a European environmental portal** (such as the EYE) compared to what is currently on offer, **are the teachers/educators and youths aged 11-16**. They would do so for the following reasons:

- **They will consider the fact that the website has been developed by the EC as a motivation to visit it** (teenagers were keen to learn more about the EU's take on environmental issues, and teachers stated that they were more likely to refer to sites

developed by an official body).

- They may **have an interest in resources** which present environmental issues from a **broader (European/global) perspective**. (Younger students in the eight-10 age bracket tend to focus on local environmental problems).
- They are likely to search for the **specific services the website offers thanks to its unique positioning** (European Best Practice exchange, networking opportunities, projects and EU funding for youth, etc).
- They **will be able to appreciate the lack of redundancies of content with that of other available EE websites** (especially teachers and students, who often search for materials to support their schoolwork, are therefore well aware of what can be found on the market and how they can use the site to complement other EE resources they know of).
- They will appreciate the fact that the website does **not simultaneously try to meet the expectations of different audiences**¹⁷.

¹⁶ Please refer to 'Section 8. Use and Promotion of the website' for more details.

¹⁷ During the Evaluation Phase, the Digital Mapping exercise indicated that the design of most EE websites targeted at youth was childish, seemingly to attract younger children. However, the content was largely of interest to youths over 10 years of age, who often do not recognise themselves in the image/branding of these sites.

The site's optimal target groups are those which will benefit from and promote its overall effectiveness ...

- **Interested in and able to cope with more interactivity on the site.** The more experienced web users (11-16 year olds) strongly favour and are very familiar with interactive sites; teachers appreciate interactive features as well, as they can complement their work – e.g. when other teachers upload new content).

The site's optimal target groups are those which will help increase its visibility and recognition ...

...because these users are likely to make regular use of the site's content and functionalities.

Teachers and youths aged 11-16 are the optimal target groups for the EYE site, according to this criterion, as they are:

- **Most likely to make use of the content of the site in a learning context** (for school and homework, as well as for extra-curricular activities), **and of the features** offered (teachers have an interest in and demand for platforms on which they can cooperate and exchange best practice. Eleven to 16 year olds, in particular, take great interest in social networks and contact with other youths).
- **Most similar** in terms of needs and preferences (**cost efficient**)

... due to their higher dissemination potential and general Internet habits.

In the Consultants' views, teachers and youth aged 11-16 are:

- **The most likely to become regular visitors.** They need the information the website can offer and are all interested in it being frequently updated: the most experienced web surfers, namely teenagers, demand and value frequent updates, and teachers are keen to be informed about new debates or teaching resources, projects, etc.
- **Possess the highest dissemination potential:**

- The **11-16 age group** often have an **influence on their peers**, by acting as trend-setters or encouraging others to participate, and **on younger children**, by setting an example and raising their environmental awareness of certain issues (mentoring potential).
- Although the majority of **teachers** does not tend to share links with their students, they often use the material provided on educational websites to support their **class work** and extra-curricular activities.

The **co-creation of content** can also act as incentive for the target groups to increase the visibility of the site as users tend to inform those around them of their contributions to the site and therefore encourage them to visit it.

- **Most likely to be drawn to the site if it is 'popular', i.e. gets a lot of traffic and therefore is 'visible'.** Most of these users employ search engines to identify the sites they want to visit (they will therefore appreciate the optimal indexation of the site, as well as its online partnerships), but they also visit sites based on a peer's recommendation.
- **Have a habit of visiting EE sites in general** and are therefore likely to know about the EYE website, thanks to other EE platforms.

Although the research revealed significant similarities between the two target groups (teachers and 11-16 year olds), **some differences still exist**, such as:

- the layout is more important for students than for teachers
- the 'entertainment' aspect of a site is more important for students than teachers
- the students' understanding of the EU is lower than that of the teachers and they would therefore need more explanations regarding the EU-specific content (jargon-free)

These differences should be taken into account during the revamp of the site.

The data also revealed that there is a **substantial difference between the old and new Member States**, in terms of their levels of environmental awareness and interest. The quality of environmental websites available to youths in different Member States also differs from country to country - a factor that should be taken into consideration in the re-development of the new EYE website.¹⁸

¹⁸ Please refer to 'Annex II - Main findings of Research Phase 2 – Target Group Consultation' for more details.

5. Content

This section provides recommendations on the **content a future EYE website** should offer in order to satisfy its predefined 'optimal Focus Audience'. The content of the website should be differentiated from its structure. The former determines the **type of information which should be offered**, while the latter determines the optimal format of the website.

The content should **be built around and relevant to the focus audience's needs, preferences and abilities**. To date, the research reveals that the existing EYE website is *somewhat relevant* to the needs of less informed users, but that **most respondents require more science-based, substantive, original content**. Another challenge is to ensure the relevance of the content in the long run, with minimal impact on DG ENV's workload. There are several ways in which this can be done, which are further discussed in '**Section 9. Maintenance/Sustainability**'.

The content will contribute to the fulfilment of the previously defined general objectives of the site if it meets the criteria presented in the following sections.

The content will exemplify the added-value of the website...

...if it offers an attractive alternative to existing national and international resources by acting as an EU youth environmental portal, thereby filling gaps in the market and avoiding redundancies.

To achieve this goal, the website's content should:

- Be **specific and relevant to its mission to serve as an EU youth environmental portal**, by:
 - providing links to useful, existing online EE resources at local and international levels,
 - providing EU level information (news, information about projects, events and milestones regarding environmental protection at the European level, presenting conflicting views, tackling global environmental issues, as well as local ones), and
 - involving the audiences in the promotion of an EU environmental message by encouraging activism.
- Offer all information in **all official EU languages**¹⁹,
- Make sure that all **EU youth can access the same type of information by filling national information gaps**. If the EYE website does not intend to be a harmonising authority in the EE sphere, it could nevertheless ensure that all EU youths can access similar EE information in their own language, and
- Act as a portal for various local, environmental information sources, as **younger students**, in particular, **respond more readily to issues which affect their lives directly**.

¹⁹ The **digital mapping exercise revealed that websites focused on youth environmental education were rarely multi-lingual**, even those of international organisations; their reach was therefore limited. The only example of a comprehensive, multi-lingual EE website is www.tryscience.org which is available in nine languages: Arabic, Chinese, English, French, German, Italian, Japanese, Portuguese, and Spanish.

The content of the website will contribute to the site's effectiveness and potential impact

...if it can be used in a learning context,²⁰ its resources can be shared and are attractive to its primary focus audience.

As the Evaluation Phase showed that students (and often teachers) rarely visit environmental websites in their leisure time, the **best way to reach** them is therefore to **provide content that is useful in their daily lives**.

From the findings made previously, the Consultant concluded that in order to meet this objective, the **content of the website should be**:

- **ready-to-use, or at least easily adaptable to the identified needs of the target groups²¹,**
- **specific** (the current website provides general information only),
- **easy to find** – classified by level of environmental proficiency in order to reflect a wide range of competencies, the predefined levels could be *Beginner*, *Intermediate*, *Advanced* and *Expert* for instance.
- **adapted to learning** activities (developed as a pedagogical tool, designed to support adults in their work with students or students involved in pedagogical activities), and
- **adapted to the needs of the specified target groups** (can be inserted into national school curricula and fill gaps in the online EE market):
 - **Teachers:**
 - **Examples of preferred subjects:** environment and health, climate change, resource consumption and waste, biofuels/renewable energy, biodiversity, local environmental problems, air pollution, European natural resources and 'energy and space'.
Need more **substantive, science-based information** (supported by statistical data), especially for students in upper-secondary schools.
 - **Most useful sections** of the EYE website were **LIBRARY** and **LINKS** sections.
Type of material they most need (in order of preference): lesson plans, group work/activities suggestions, ideas for outdoor experiments and activities, educational videos, examples of good practice (projects, campaigns, contests), Open Source (OS) projects, conferences, links to national EE websites. **Additional suggestions included:** booklets, a "*Teacher's manual for organisation of environmental projects*" and information **about EE training programmes for teachers**.
The above-mentioned elements (EE training programmes, tailored teaching materials and tools) would all **help improve educators' confidence to teach EE**.
The preferred formats for teaching resources are: **PDF, DOC** and **HTML**.

²⁰ *Learning context* in this document means the informal and formal education framework, such as: school curriculum, homework and schoolwork assignments, extracurricular activities organised by NGOs or other organisations (such as churches, scouts, etc), educational websites.

²¹ In this context, 'ready-to-use' refers to materials that **have been designed as instantly accessible teaching resources** (i.e. to be used in lessons without teachers having to adapt them after downloading). The teachers also likely to have access to "semi-processed" information which **can be easily manipulated, modified, integrated and contextualised**. They look for materials which they can adapt according to their teaching purposes and the specific interests of their students.

- **Students:**
 - o **Examples of preferred subjects:** global warming, environment and health, water and air pollution, waste and recycling, energy problems/alternative energy sources, deforestation, local environmental problems, Genetically Modified Organisms, European natural resources and biodiversity protection. **Additional suggestions:** recommendations of environmentally friendly products and companies, suggestions on how children can help protect the environment. In school they usually cover: pollution, greenhouse effect, recycling, energy production, biodiversity, etc.
 - o **Most useful sections** of the EYE website were the **WASTE** and **NATURE** sections.
 - o **Type of material** they look for: examples of experiments, fact sheets, statistical data, booklets, environmental dictionaries, videos, local, national and European environmental news, **regular information on** (youth) eco-events, a virtual gallery **of students' work**, etc.
The website could also propose a **list of schools/teachers interested in partnership opportunities** on environmental issues with their contact details.

To effectively combine all these elements, the Consultant recommends that the new website:

- act as a **repository of local resources** (well-adapted to the specific needs of each local EE market); and
- **encourage user-generated content**, which may result in the exchange of Best Practice.

For example, a system of **user accounts** and profiles could be set up on or via the site (with users' photos, environmental profiles, nationalities, ages, etc). This would make users an integral part of the site and could help control sources of inappropriate content. Messages on forums or articles could be automatically forwarded to email accounts too, based on the results of an 'environmental interests' questionnaire, which users would be asked to complete when they first register on the site. This should also help drive repeat traffic.

Please refer to '**Section 6. Structure**' and '**Section 7. Tools and Features**' for more details on this.

The content of the site will help increase its level of visibility and recognition ...

...if it remains up-to-date and helps attract new audiences.

This would require:

- **Content which can be disseminated and shared on or via the site.**
- **Regular (weekly), top level (homepage) updates²²** – the site will remain up-to-date if a repository format is adopted (allows low cost updating), which would also feature user-generated content.
- **The site to provide information on events and milestones** in environmental protection at EU level, promote environmental campaigns.

Examples of content suggested by the respondents:

- **‘Recycle-art’ (section on which students could display art work made out of recycled materials.** This could perhaps be established as an annual competitive event across the EU)
- **Animals and plants**
- **Good practice** examples
- **Work and volunteering opportunities²³**
- **Environmental studies**
- **Ideas of research projects**
- **EU environmental legislation**
- **Social environment** (smoking, diet, drugs, etc.)

How to develop the initial content of the website?

In the Consultant’s view the content can be initially developed through the following channels:

- Build-up of an initial database of links
- Contacting teacher organisations and encouraging them to propose material on the site or recommend some on the site
- Partnerships with other scientific site
- Basic research on the basis of country reports in order to identify main information gaps (particularly in new Member States)
- Network of youth and/or teacher correspondents to provide links to local resources etc.
- Examples of good practice from EC and non-EC sites

By adopting this model, DG ENV’s involvement in the website’s content creation is reduced given that most is user-generated.

²² The frequency of updates of the homepage is a key demand of the target audience, but would also benefit the indexation of the site in search engines.

²³ Example of website providing lists of environmentally focused job offers: <http://www.enviro2b.com/>.

6. Structure

This section provides recommendations on the structure of the future EYE website, i.e. **the framework that shapes the website** and defines its navigation scheme, as well as the presentation of the content. Information about specific features, which help ensure **optimal user-friendliness**, is also provided in this section.

The website will be attractive if it is extremely user-friendly, its layout is clear **and the user is directed to useful information from the very first page.**

The Consultants **considered which of the following three options was the best:**

- Web portal
- Content-rich website
- Content-light website focused on European character only

More details about these types of structure are provided on in this section.

Preliminary remark on the site structure

As mentioned in **Section 4. Focus audience**, the fact that the EC aims to communicate to several categories of users highlights the idea of creating **different platforms for different target groups**. This solution **has been considered several times previously, but was deemed too expensive**, given the limited EC human and financial resources available for the development of this website²⁴. The Consultant therefore recommended the development of a '**cross-target group platform**'.

This 'all-encompassing' format **can**, however, **present certain disadvantages**, such as:

- the **superficiality of certain content** for the more advanced users;
- the **need for simpler information** for those less informed;
- the **difficulties of meeting the needs of younger/older students** and teachers simultaneously, and
- the **lack of more scientifically-based information**, which would assist users with homework and/or schoolwork.

The Consultants propose that tools and features which **clearly categorise the content be used to address these issues**. This system would provide some of the advantages of dividing the site by types of users, without implying such high costs. Please refer to **Section 7. Tools and Features** for more details.

²⁴ However, it should also be noted that the development of complex technology is sometimes less expensive overall than the development of a website with a lower budget and higher, longer-term maintenance obligations.

Optimal Site Structure: Main Characteristics

The most popular educational websites with the students and teachers have the following common characteristics:

- a **clear structure** and/or **straight forward menu**, which make it easy to find what they are looking for (e.g. on-site search engines, web portals, etc);
- clearly classified, **'easy to find' content**;
- a **user-friendly layout** and **high level of interactivity** (e.g. games, possibility to communicate and post comments on the site, up/download content, etc.), and
- **easy-to-use navigation tools**.

For some users, and especially the teachers, the **structure of the site is more important than the layout**.

Based on these findings, the Consultant has concluded that, for the EYE website to meet these criteria, its optimal structure ought to be that of a web-portal.

This format²⁵ offers **multiple advantages**. These will be further presented in the following sections which assess its relevance to the main objectives of the EYE website:

The structure of a web-portal will help increase the value of the website...

... because a web-portal is, by virtue of its characteristics, the most appropriate web format with which to link to other online environmental education resources and/or collect these in a database.

This simple structure would enable the website to offer a significant volume of information to its users on a **relatively low budget**.²⁶

Advantages of this structure:

- more flexibility: content uploads and external links **help keep the site up-to-date**,
- **low cost**,
- **no need to separate sections** by target group,
- an **'easy to grasp'** homepage provides a clear overview of the content – transparent division of sections and titles.

This structure differs from:

- a **content-rich website**, which would entail dividing the website by target groups and adapting the text for each different group. The development of different platforms for each target group would be a much more costly solution (depends on allocated budget); and
- a **content-light website** solely focused on the European dimension of EE (i.e. projects or campaigns at the European level only). Using this structure, the content would still be very light/limited (no general environmental information or content duplicated on other EE websites etc.). Ultimately such web sites are not sustainable, due to their low level of repeat traffic.

²⁵ Example of environmental web-portals: <http://www.ecoearth.info>, <http://www.care2.com>.

²⁶ Another good example of the suggested structure for the new EYE site can be found on the *Science upd8* website: www.upd8.org.uk.

The **added-value of the website** (if it were developed as a web-portal) **would not be restricted to one sphere only**. This structure would allow DG ENV to **take advantage of the site's optimal positioning** on the web, which should enable it to fill national gaps in online environmental education across the EU and encourage pan-European networking.

The new structure of the site (web-portal) will increase its overall effectiveness and impact ...

... because it will allow content to be clearly classified and the user-friendliness issues mentioned during the Evaluation Phase to be effectively addressed.

The web-portal should be organised around four main 'pillars':

1. **EU Environmental News** (a section dedicated to EU-sourced content),
2. **Take Action** (a section dedicated to informing users about opportunities for involvement in environmental projects),
3. **Resources** (a section offering a **library of links** which federates existing material and a **digital library of videos, photos of projects**, etc.), and
4. **Community** (a **common space**, possibly a teachers' forum, to share and disseminate EE related information, including a project idea section).

The **materials** and/or **links** provided should **all** be **well-defined**. They should clearly indicate the following:

- the **(degree of) relevance of the material to a subject** on the school curriculum (Chemistry, Biology, Social Science, English as a Foreign Language, etc.),
- level of **difficulty** for the **students**,
- **level of ICT proficiency required for the site/material**, and
- **languages** in which the material is available (tick box for each EU language).

This can be ensured with **minimal involvement of the EC**, by allowing users who upload the content to **'tag' or 'characterise'**²⁷ it during the uploading process, based on the existing classification system of the EYE website. Additionally, **well-defined tags will enhance the accuracy of the site's internal search engine**.

It is fundamental that the homepage immediately explain **the value of uploading teaching materials to the site and then tagging them**. Please refer to section **9. Use and promotion of the site** for more details.

Furthermore, in the Consultants' view, a **more user-friendly and attractive EYE website should provide:**

- a home page with a **clear overview of the site content**,
- a **site map**,
- an **internal search engine**,
- a **menu with clearly divided sections**,
- **logically grouped pages and clear page titles**,

²⁷ More detail in Section 7. Features.

- **multiple routes** to the **same destination** as web users have different surfing styles,
- **fast loading speeds** as some schools/pupils do not have high speed Internet connections,
- **easy access** to the website for those with **disabilities** (e.g. large font and spoken text for the visually impaired),
- **original layout**,
- **intuitive navigation**,
- **easy, clear and complete contact information**, and
- **a virtual tour** and/or **expanded help section** to explain the navigation and website structure to **less experienced users**.

The website's structure should comply with a general rule that **it takes no more than three clicks for a visitor to find what they are looking for**.

The web-portal structure will enhance levels of **recognition** and **visibility** of the site ...

... because it provides a framework that makes updating easy and which can be readily adapted to new Internet trends.

The advantages of a web-portal in this respect are that:

- **user-generated content** is easy to implement on a web-portal,
 - the layout allows **easy addition or removal of content**, which means the homepage can be regularly updated to show more recent information ('hot topics', new project opportunities, etc.), and
- the **structure itself is adaptable, to better** reflect new Internet trends or users preferences. The workload required to add or remove a service is also minimal, thanks to this lighter format. Several ways to make sure the website can be easily updated are presented in **Section 9. Maintenance/Sustainability**.

7. Tools and Features

This section provides recommendations on the **tools and features of the future EYE website**. They are a **prominent aspect of a website** as online technology generates more interest from (potential) users, particularly young users, than most other aspects of a site. For this reason, tools and features are often advertised in order to attract site traffic and, in the case of an educational website like EYE, they also serve to make learning fun. Carefully selected features on a webpage **serve both to attract** focus audience and **to ensure more effective communications between themselves and the site owner**. In addition to reflecting the needs and expectations of the focus audience of the EYE website, the **proposed features should also help achieve the website's objectives and desired long-term impact**.

The Consultant wishes to stress **two important issues** regarding the tools and features proposed in the following sections:

- **Although this section proposes a rich catalogue of popular and appropriate tools and features** in order to demonstrate the various options available, for the EYE website to remain a simple, usable communication tool, it should **propose only a limited amount of selected tools and features**. More **can be added at later stages of the lifetime of the website**, to replace existing features that are not used enough, or to complement another service when a specific need is identified. The Consultant presents its **preferred combination of tools** for the EYE website at the end of the present section;
- Although the choice of tools and features is crucial, DG ENV should also keep in mind that **without occasional human support and a minimal level of maintenance and follow-up, the site's overall effectiveness could be reduced**. Please refer to **Section 10. Maintenance/Sustainability** for more details.

Based on the preceding evaluation phases and especially on the target group consultation conducted in July and August 2008, the Consultant **proposes that the following types of tools and features be used to improve the EYE website**²⁸:

The tools and features will highlight the **added value of the site ...**

... if they provide and support new ways of learning about the environment which are compatible with the pan-European nature of the site.

In order to fulfil this criterion, the tools and features should **support the 'EU-specific' content of the site**.

To do this, the Consultant recommends use of some of the following features:

- **EU environmental map** showing the situation by Member State;²⁹
- tools to **support the exchange of good practice** (please see below 'interactivity' for more details)

²⁸ In each subsection of the document the various tools and features are always listed in order of preference, based on the findings of the Target Group Consultation.

²⁹ **Examples of interactive maps of Europe on the Europa server**, which could be used as a model for the development of the 'EU environmental map': example of a 'zoomable map' (http://europa.eu/abc/maps/index_en.htm) and DG Development proposes a 'clickable' map providing information about the area that has been clicked on (http://ec.europa.eu/development/geographical/regionscountries_en.cfm).

- **'How to' section** facilitating involvement from other **networks** or **projects** that are indicated in the EU environmental calendar of events;
- EU **calendar** of environmental activities/campaigns.³⁰
- On-going EU environmental **debate corner/forum**
- EU environmental quarterly **newsletter** for teachers (students appeared to be less interested in this tool)

The site's **tools and features** will increase its overall **effectiveness and impact** ...

... if they are useful, interactive, entertaining and user-friendly.³¹

One of the main remarks made by those surveyed was that it was essential for the website to **adopt a less 'top-down' approach** and to include more interactive features to appeal to its focus audience and drive repeat traffic. **The website should therefore aim to become more user-centric**³².

Usefulness – In the context of the EYE website, this criterion refers to tools and features which **can be used in a so-called 'learning context'** to meet the needs of the teachers and youth aged 11-16.

Recommended tools related to entertainment/leisure time:

- links to popular games on other sites³³ or **development of new and redevelopment of existing games on EYE**;
- **'activity packs'** including the necessary tips and information for students **to conduct leisure time activities** related to EE;
- **an animated character**, which guides visitors through the site (teachers believe that it helps students understand key issues); [as a cautionary note: such a device ought not to be a 'cute' cartoon as this is likely to be perceived as childish and detract from the pedagogical attraction of the website]

Interactivity – **Introducing a certain level of interactivity** to the site is **strategically important** as it allows the users to get involved, as well as to publish their own content on the site and share it with others. **Thanks to these features which encourage a more participative approach**, users will be able to **interact among themselves and with the site itself**. The **target groups expressed a strong interest in these features**, despite the fact that the data revealed that most teachers do not yet have a habit of using

³⁰ Example of EC website which allows user submission of project info, events and links: <http://www.transport-research.info/web/projects/submit.cfm> (DG TREN)

³¹ Please refer to **Section 6. Structure** for more information.

³² Please note that many tools and features are linked and are not always standalone items. For instance, a digital library of photos is a useful tool that also implies a certain degree of interactivity in terms of content uploads.

³³ One Expert gave an **example of a very successful web application** that had been launched by the Caribbean Conservation Corporation. It managed to encourage students to visit the website repeatedly by promoting a migration tracking programme using satellite telemetry. This programme was entitled '*Tour de Turtles*' and allowed users to follow the migration of eight sea turtles and 'bet' on the one that would arrive first in warmer seas. It is an educational project that has garnered much success by involving the users concretely in a natural process. (<http://www.tourdeturtles.org/>)

these types of online features on an everyday basis (younger audiences were usually more familiar and proficient with basic interactive online tools). The reason many teachers rarely use interactive features is that they often have limited ICT skills, computer technology not being part of their training programmes as teachers. However, they demonstrated a real **curiosity for these tools** as they believe **they can help them in their everyday work** and allow them to have a more participative role on the site.

Recommended tools to ensure a higher level of interactivity on the site:

- **content uploading/user-generated content;**
- **rating system** - Users themselves would be asked to quickly **rank materials they upload** in order to help create a valuable library of online environmental resources. This would be done using a **rating system of 1-5**, with 1 being used to rate a resource as 'excellent' and 5 as 'of limited value'. This system would help demonstrate the perceived **credibility/reliability** of the material, based on its popularity with other students or teachers³⁴;
- **tagging system** to better define the content that is being uploaded – the content can be classified by **topic, type of document, level of environmental proficiency** required to understand it – 'Beginner, Intermediate, Advanced, Expert', etc.³⁵
- **an online meeting point** (forum)³⁶;
- possibility to **add comments**;
- **posting videos/photos** of own school/school groups
- **'ask the expert' section** (a section where users can post their questions and teachers or experts answer to them online)

³⁴ Please consult the following website for an illustration of the recommended rating, tagging and adding comments options: <http://www.ecoearth.info/links/cool/>. This is an example of good practice in that it provides a simple, clear uploading facility and a useful links library.

³⁵ A **tag** is a non-hierarchical keyword or term assigned to a piece of information (such as an internet bookmark, digital image, or computer file). This kind of metadata helps describe an item and allows it to be found again by browsing or searching. **Tags are usually chosen informally and personally** by the item's creator or by its viewer, depending on the system, but on a public organisation's website, the Consultant would **recommend developing a list of pre-defined tags** from which the users can select from pre-determined options when uploading content. This will limit the amount of 'free text' which needs to be moderated on the site.

³⁶ Good practice example of a forum ('Europa server'): http://europa.eu/debateurope/index_en.htm

What type of content would the users be willing to upload?

The teachers would be willing to add:	The students would be willing to add:
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • information about projects they participate in • teaching materials or methods³⁷ • advice on online resources they use • information about their school • information for parents 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • pictures and videos of environmental activities • descriptions of local environmental problems • information about environmental initiatives they know of or are involved in • links to resources or games • scripts and background material for presentations or homework

Entertainment. The need for and importance of entertainment in education was mentioned many times by teachers (especially those teaching younger students) and youth. This should therefore also be taken into account on the site. However, the **developments should not be too ambitious** (limited to basic features) as the Digital Mapping demonstrated the existence of **many very successful and well-developed websites** which offer attractive and entertaining ways to learn about the environment and it **will be difficult for the EYE website to compete against these**, especially given the high cost of developing such features. Given the level and focus of the 'competition', though EYE would like to be as entertaining as possible, it primarily aims to serve as an EU environmental education tool; the only one of its kind.

Recommended tools related to entertainment/leisure time:

- links to popular games on other sites³⁸ or **development of new and existing games on EYE**;
- **'activity packs'** including the necessary tips and information for students **to conduct leisure time activities** related to EE;
- **an animated character**, which guides visitors through the site (teachers believe that it helps students understand key issues);
- a **mascot** (which could also be the animated site guide)

³⁷ For a **best practice example** of 'sharable' teaching material and videos: www.teachersdomain.org.

³⁸ One Expert gave an **example of a very successful web application** that had been launched by the Caribbean Conservation Corporation. It managed to encourage students to visit the website repeatedly by promoting a migration tracking programme using satellite telemetry. This programme was entitled '*Tour de Turtles*' and allowed users to follow the migration of eight sea turtles and 'bet' on the one that would arrive first in warmer seas. It is an educational project that has garnered much success by involving the users concretely in a natural process. (<http://www.tourdeturtles.org/>).

The site's tools and features will help increase its levels of visibility and recognition ...

...if they can attract repeat traffic and new users.

The levels of visibility and recognition of the site are directly linked to the amount of traffic it attracts (on a regular basis) and to how users promote it. There are tools that a site can offer to encourage repeat visits from its existing users, while increasing its levels of dissemination and therefore its reach. They usually aim to trigger a reaction from users or a certain degree of involvement which can inspire users to come back to the site.

Those tools are:

- an EU news corner³⁹;
- small scale surveys/competitions with prizes;
- a 'topic of the month' rubric (that always announces the next month's 'hot' topic);
- option to 'tell a friend' (a feature that allows users to send an email to a friend directly from the site in order to recommend it to him);
- a mailing list for flash news only (to inform users when site updates occur or about new projects and campaigns);⁴⁰
- elect the most interesting project uploaded to the site's online library of teaching resources on the website and give a prize to the winner (the 'Environment for Young Europeans' project award').

³⁹ Example of EC website publishing headline news: DG Development:

http://ec.europa.eu/development/services/news_en.cfm#events

⁴⁰ Example of EC website offering the possibility to subscribe to receive alerts:

http://ec.europa.eu/external_relations/site/updates.htm, <http://www.transport-research.info/web/forms/newsletter.cfm>

Proposed Combination of Tools

The next table presents the Consultants' proposed mix of tools, i.e. tools chosen from those cited in this section that could be on the website from the very first stages of its launch.

Proposed Combination of Tools and Features					
EU Added-Value	Awareness raising (related to support for learning activities)	Interactivity	Entertainment	Drive repeat traffic	User-friendliness
EU map of environmental issues by Member State	Library of links (user-generated content, use of 'rating and tagging' options)		Games (links to popular games on other websites)	'Topic of the month' rubric (which always announces next month's topic too)	Internal search engine
'How to' section	Digital library of photos and videos (content generated by users and external 'partners')			'Tell a friend' feature	Site map
EU calendar of environmental activities	Factsheets uploaded by teachers and students (content generated by users and external 'partners')			A mailing list for flash news about updates and info about new campaigns (mini version of the newsletter)	Expanded help section (optional: virtual tour of the site)
Tools to support exchange of good practice (see 'interactivity')	(Optional) Newsletters for teachers	Online meeting point (forum)	Small scale surveys/competitions (with prizes to win)		Easy access for those with disabilities
	Activity packs for leisure time			Environmental prize for most voted project	

This combination of tools will be **articulated around / inserted into the website's four pillar structure** (please refer to **Section 6. Structure** for more details):

- **EU Environnemental News**
- **Take Action!**
- **Resources**
- **Community**

8. Verbal and Visual Identity (VVI)

As mentioned previously, **the Consultant recommends that Verbal and Visual Identity (VVI) guidelines be developed for the EYE website.** The following section provides an indication of key factors that should be taken into account during this process.

Why does the website need to follow VVI guidelines?

Following a single set of VVI guidelines **ensures that the website is developed with a sense of consistency** and that the **focus audience is not misled and distracted** from the website's core objective. It **prevents distortion of content and messages.**

Verbal Identity — a tool to improve understanding of EYE

A verbal identity helps ensure a coherent tone that allows for cohesion and continuity of content. Because verbal identity consolidates the overall message and impact of the site, it can also greatly increase its perceived usefulness, ease of use and attractiveness.

Visual Identity — a tool to ensure EYE is recognisable

The visual identity of a communication tool is often defined as the 'translation' of its mission into symbols (colour, artwork, etc.). A visual identity ensures that the website is distinctive, easily recognisable, and that the component parts look similar. The potential impact of this cohesive approach on the end user's emotions is powerful

However, there is yet **another significant reason for establishing a specific VVI for the EYE website:** the findings of the Evaluation Phase suggest that the perceived attractiveness of the EYE site is limited, which can be attributed to inconsistencies in its VVI.

Which factors should be taken into account during the development of the EYE website's VVI guidelines?

Students and teachers alike generally found the EYE website "aesthetically dull", "too plain" (lacking in visual diversity) and in need of a memorable slogan or a distinct mascot. Moreover, many respondents **felt the website's tone, layout, structure and ('childish') graphics were inappropriate for students aged 11-16 as well as their teachers.** The site was generally judged as **very static, 'uncool' and old-fashioned,** because of its **limited interactivity.** Specific issues, such as the **dominance of the colour green** and the repetitive **background sounds,** were often considered to play an important part in the website's overall lack of attractiveness.

Overall, the **website's appearance**, or 'annoying features', was of far **lesser concern for teachers than for students**, who often reject sites outright because of these problems. These findings reveal that the **need for an appealing design and a stronger focus on the site's 'look & feel'** are therefore even more critical if the site aims to attract more students.

Another necessary consideration during the development of the VVI of the site is the possibility of **re-branding the site**. Indeed, the research revealed that the target groups felt that **DG ENV could envisage changing the site's current name** (*Environment for Young Europeans*) for a **more memorable, simple and distinctive one**.

New name suggestions included:

- Using the abbreviation as the name of the site: EYE
- Using the word 'Nature' and combining it with words such as 'environment' and 'young' (for instance: *EU environment, Environment, Ecoteens, Young Ecologists, European Kids*)
- Miscellaneous: *Greenlife; Saving the World; Environmental Protection for Beginners; For a cleaner Europe; Future, Environment, Europe.*

The Consultant thus recommends that the EYE website pursues a distinct verbal and visual character, using a simple and easy-to-grasp language (in various languages), incorporating amongst others more functionalities and visual features on the basis of the following elements: use of colours; font types; and pictures and animation that will appeal to the Focus Audience of the site: teachers and youth 11-16.

Therefore:

The VVI will help exemplify the added-value of the site ...

... if the language and visual features selection makes the first time user perceive the website as useful and easy to use (simple, easy-to-grasp and explains concept).

The VVI will increase its overall effectiveness and impact ...

... if:

- The **visual identity** is distinctive, memorable and coherent – more modern colours and layout
- The **website name/branding** is easy to remember and 'catchy' (no need to change URL because most users find websites through search engines)
- The **language selection** corresponds to target group's needs and preferences (more serious tone).

The VVI will enhance levels of recognition and visibility of the site...

... if:

- A system **to monitor new trends** is set up
- The **content is scrutinised** (and moderated when user generated) in order to guarantee consistency and conformity with VVI

9. Use and Promotion of the EYE website

The evaluation phase revealed that **one of the main challenges of the EYE website is its lack of visibility.**

Although the current site already presents some good aspects, it was **insufficiently promoted across Europe.** As a result, the evaluation project was the first opportunity most respondents had to find out about it. The high marks it received suggest that the current version could have been more popular, even in its current form, if it had been adequately publicised.

The **promotion of the website is an essential part of its development.** It encourages (new) traffic and, at the very least, informs or reminds (potential) visitors that the (updated) resource exists. Given the general lack of familiarity of those interviewed and surveyed with the EYE website, **publicising the site is almost as important as rehabilitating it.**

Use

How can the website be used for maximum impact?

- It can serve as a promotional **platform for senior European Commission figures.**
- It can be used to **promote pan-European exchange** (e.g. between students, teachers, education specialists, environmental policy specialists, etc.).
- It can capitalise on its portal function and its privileged position as a multi-generational, multi-lingual, cross-sectoral tool;
- It can be used as a tool to **identify gaps in the market;**
- **It can use specific features to convert users into 'multipliers'** (please refer below to the 'Promotion' section).
- **New content and news updates** can be published on a **dynamic homepage** by using the web-portal to 'generate new content'.

Promotion

The website should develop its own online promotion strategy:

- **Capitalise on the existence of well-known, highly visited Environmental Education youth websites (online synergies strategy);**

EYE would develop partnerships and synergies between the services and information the other websites' (NGOs, public institutions or private organisations, etc.) and the EYE site offer⁴¹ and in this way, take advantage of their traffic. As these websites would link to the EYE website, that would also help increase its traffic.

- **The educational portals and (national and international) EE websites often visited by teachers and students can be linked to the EYE website.** Well designed EYE banners could also be displayed on these sites to attract new visitors to it, while EYE could reciprocate by providing a link to their site(s) on its portal;
- **Make use of other websites on the *Europa* server to promote the website (DG EAC, etc.);**
- **Make use of the endorsement potential of specific target groups and of other Commission Directorates-General;**
 - **A synergy strategy with other DGs would result in numerous positive outcomes.** Not only would it increase traffic to the EYE website, it would also raise awareness of the work undertaken by all DGs involved in environmental affairs (either directly or indirectly), thus raise the motivation of all involved actors to contribute to the site, and subsequently promote the exchange of information and advice amongst DGs. The EYE website could also support major **European initiatives / campaigns** of these other DGs, thereby enhancing their European and national level 'visibility' to youths.
 - **Students would also be able to endorse the website** if, for example, they were offered tools which enabled them to add the website to their social network profile on popular social networking sites such as Facebook, MySpace, Bebo, etc. Students could also become **EYE trend-setters for their peers** if a **sponsorship system** were implemented on the site, i.e. if they successfully persuade three or more other students to participate in a competition on the website, their name will be entered in a prize lottery. Other features, such as **'Recommend this website to a Friend'** may also help to attract **new visitors**.
- **Optimise the website's search engine indexation in all EU languages;**

The Member State survey results showed that the majority of the European students and teachers do not remember the URLs of their favourite websites, but instead use search engines to find them (the Google search engine was mentioned most often). **Almost no survey participants knew the EYE website or its URL, thus showing how 'invisible' the website is on the Internet.**

⁴¹ Examples of possible partner websites: UNEP Tunza (<http://www.unep.org/Tunza/>), WWF (<http://www.wwf.org/>), National Geographic (<http://www.nationalgeographic.com/>), Défi pour La Terre (<http://www.defipourlaterre.org/>), Eco-Schools (<http://www.eco-schools.org/>), Friends of the Earth Europe (<http://www.foeeurope.org/youngfoee/index.htm>).

- **Promote the ‘EYE project award for youth’ and with it the sharing of good/best practices;**

The ‘**EYE project award**’ is granted by the users of the sites to the EE projects they found the most interesting – the ‘best good practice’ example. It would be awarded to the best rated environmental project uploaded to the site’s online library of teaching resources. An article featuring the winning project could also be posted on the EYE site, as could articles about the runners up. This award could be advertised via banners on EYE and other websites, and via small articles and newsletters in order to attract users to the site – thereby encouraging users to talk about their EE initiatives and add related photos⁴².

- **Self-promote;**

Information about the website itself should be disseminated to the potential target groups, i.e. **success stories about the networks constituted on the site, data traffic, special features, etc.**⁴³. The site must **demonstrate and promote its utility to youth and teachers**. It should also encourage environmental organisations to feed their most up-to-date information (especially statistical data) to the site’s online library. This arrangement would keep the EYE site up-to-date and active, while also promoting the work of the environmental organisation(s) providing its resources.

Central to the website’s promotional strategy should be **the fact that it is an EC website, which should therefore benefit from a higher level of recognition** by teachers as interviews showed that teachers generally preferred to refer to information sources provided by official bodies.

It should also encourage comment posting by listing the most interesting comments on the homepage and regularly updating them.

There are also some offline promotion strategies to develop around the website:

- **Launch campaign;**

The campaign should **seek relevant opportunities to communicate about the resources offered on the EYE website** – contests, teacher conferences, environmental events or educational projects which will promote the website. The participants could be informed of the website and given gadgets displaying its web address, e.g. recycled pens or pencils, or products with the online EU eco-label⁴⁴, USB devices, mouse pads, etc.

- **Within the EC;**

Raise awareness of the site within the EC by **informing or reminding other DGs that they can add content and links to the EYE site**.

- **Establish partnerships with other actors / stakeholders in the field;**

⁴² One could also envisage expanding the concept to other sections of the site: ‘Vote for the best EE game on the site’, ‘Best factsheet’. ‘Best video’, etc, which would encourage site activity and help solidify the site’s online resource library.

⁴³ Confer with the *National Geographic* dissemination strategy on its websites for young **audiences** - http://kids.nationalgeographic.com/staticfiles/NGS/Shared/StaticFiles/NGKids/Image/ngk_mediakit07.pdf

⁴⁴ http://ec.europa.eu/environment/ecolabel/index_en.htm

10. Maintenance and Sustainability

A **strategy to ensure the overall sustainability** of the website should be defined. In the Consultant's view, the website can remain attractive and useful with close monitoring of its basic strategic components, using channels that do not require a significant additional workload for the EC.

The website should be regularly updated, closely monitored and user-centric

First of all, the website should be **reviewed very frequently** in order to ensure that it remains attractive to its audience, given the speed of technological advance and innovation. Internet users' expectations are constantly evolving, based on rapidly changing online trends. This needs to be taken into account at all stages of the development of the youth website, as well as during maintenance work afterwards, particularly as one of the site's key target groups – younger users – is extremely sensitive to such trends. **The only feedback that counts is that of the users, who also speak by their actions (i.e. they return to sites they like and find useful).**

Regular updates are mandatory

- **Content (bi-monthly at a minimum)**

Another way for the site to remain up-to-date and active in a simple cost-efficient manner is to **allow visitors to post comments** on articles, teaching material or news, or **to upload content**, which they rank and tag themselves. The online environment is very fast-moving and users usually only visit sites that are frequently updated. This is important, not only because of **constant online technological developments**, but also because **environmental education** is itself a **fast-moving field**.

What **type of content needs EC-sourced updating?**

- EU news sections
- EU project section
- Topic-of-the-month section
- Small scale surveys to drive repeat traffic
- News flashes to a mailing list (created thanks to a registering system on the site) to inform users about new content

What **type of content will be updated thanks to user uploads?**

- **General content related to the 'resources' part of the site:** videos, photos, etc. for digital library, links, teaching materials which are then ranked and tagged, job advertisements, etc.

The **homepage layout must indicate that regular content updates take place** and show (in a few words) which new materials were added when (Please refer to **Section 5. Content** for more information about the type of updates that can be made to the site to ensure its visibility and recognition in the long run).

- **Technical**

In order to remain up-to-date, a website should be re-assessed (not necessarily revised) every six months (please see below, Panel of Experts).

- **Verbal and Visual Identity**

The rebranding and VVI guidelines of the site should be respected with each new development and yearly revision.

A new approach to monitoring the site

- **Regular moderation of the user-generated content:**

- By DG ENV (or a subcontractor): Photos, videos, links⁴⁵
- By teachers / Forum moderators: comments

Selection process: **one forum moderator from each EU country** would be selected annually for these honorary, voluntary positions⁴⁶. Once selected, they would be responsible for checking the site every two days, deleting inappropriate comments and forwarding questions as necessary. In particularly busy periods, they would be responsible for asking colleagues for help. In return, these EYE site managers would be able to post articles about the EE achievements of their country, school, colleagues or pupils; local environmental problems or issues their students had particular difficulty understanding.

- **Traffic data analysis**

A **system for monitoring web traffic** ought to be set up to keep a (permanent) record of user traffic, by tracking a host of different issues: popularity of website sections, languages, volume and origin of traffic, etc. It should also be used to analyse the profiles of first-time visitors and frequent users. The data should be saved for a longer period than it is currently.

- **Collecting user-feedback via:**

- A **feedback** section
- Small, annual, **online surveys** of the site

- **Panel of Experts**

A **system to monitor new trends** should also be established in order to ensure that the site keeps up with developments in online technology and users' fast-changing preferences. **The Panel of Experts** also ought to assess how up-to-date the website is **on a regular basis**. They would provide **strategic advice regarding the maintenance** of the site and the changes required to ensure it continues to meet the needs and preferences (if remains modern and attractive) of the key target groups.

The Consultant recommends that the **profiles of the Expert Panel be diverse**, reflective of all potential users. It should also include professionals with experience in website evaluation and education, particularly youth and online (environmental) education. We also advise that **young users themselves be involved** in the process.

⁴⁵ Users should be required to tag their content after upload in order to improve the site's search system. However, as the Consultant recommends the use of a very comprehensive list of preset tags, there will be only little need to moderate the 'tagging' itself.

⁴⁶ The application process could be similar to the one used for youth as explained under 'Panel of Experts' further in this section.

Our suggestion is to establish a separate Youth Advisory Council, as has been done by UNEP for its Tunza website⁴⁷. This Council could meet online on a yearly or twice yearly basis to discuss the site and their related preferences. Council membership would be based on mini job applications, vacancies would be listed online each year with deadline for application and a one year mandate, renewable once, would apply.

The advantages of this system are that:

- **It would help ensure that the views of young people in all EU regions are actively represented** and that younger users are not intimidated by a pre-dominantly adult presence when expressing their points of view on the site (maximum feedback).
- **It would encourage youths to inform their peers of EU EE programmes** they could be involved in, while preparing members of the Youth Council for the working world.

⁴⁷ For reference, see: http://www.unep.org/tunza/youth/About_Tunza/Advisory_Council.asp

Environment for Young Europeans SUMMARY OF THE RECOMMENDATIONS

- This section presents the summary of the recommendations for the *Environment for Young Europeans* (EYE) website.

Objectives	Focus audience	Content	Structure	Tools and Features	Visual and Verbal Identity	Use and Promotion
<p>General Objective 1</p> <p>A real added-value within the context of online environmental education is ensured if it meets the following criteria:</p>	<p>It targets the audiences that can benefit from its European focus and are in search for the specific services it offers.</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> Youth 11-16 + Teachers and educators/ youth workers 	<p>It offers an attractive alternative to existing national and international resources by acting as an EU youth environmental portal, thereby filling gaps in the market and avoiding redundancies, i.e.:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> Is specific and relevant to its mission to serve as an EU youth environmental portal: <ul style="list-style-type: none"> providing links to useful existing online EE resources at local and international level providing EU level information (news, information about projects, events and milestones regarding environmental protection at the European level, presenting conflicting views, tackling global environmental issues, as well as local ones), and involving the audiences in the promotion of an EU environmental message by encouraging activism. Offers all information in all official EU languages Make sure that all EU youth can access the same type of information by filling national information gaps. Act as a portal for various local, environmental information sources, as younger students, in particular, respond more readily to issues which affect their lives directly 	<p>It is developed in the form of a web portal, the most appropriate web format with which to link to other online environmental education resources and/or collect these in a database.</p> <p>Advantages:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> more flexibility: content uploads and external links help keep the site up-to-date low cost no need to separate sections by target group, and 'easy to grasp' homepage provides a clear overview of the content – transparent division of sections and titles <p>This structure differs from:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> a content-rich website, which would entail dividing the website by target groups and adapting the text for each different group and a content-light website solely focused on the European dimension of EE (i.e. projects or campaigns at the European level only) 	<p>It provides and supports new ways of learning about the environment in accordance with the pan-European nature of the site with:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> An environmental map showing the situation by Member State Tools to support the exchange of good practice 'How to' section facilitating involvement from other networks or projects in the EU environmental calendar of events EU calendar of environmental activities/campaigns. On-going EU environmental debate corner/forum EU environmental quaterly newsletter for teachers (students appeared to be less interested in this tool) 	<p>The visual and verbal identity is well-defined and consistent (guidelines are developed), i.e. the language and visual features selection makes the first time user perceive the website as useful and easy to use (simple, easy-to-grasp and explains concept).</p>	<p>The website should maximise its potential by:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> serving as a promotional platform for various European Commission actors being used to promote pan-European exchange (e.g. between students, teachers, education specialists, environmental policy specialists, etc.)

Objectives	Focus Audience	Content	Structure	Tools and Features	Visual and Verbal Identity	Use and Promotion
<p>General Objective 2</p> <p>The website reaches a high-level of effectiveness and impact if it has the following characteristics:</p>	<p>Targets the audiences that have:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> a significant interest in environmental issues the capacity to help achieve the website's core objectives and desired long term impact; a certain level of homogeneity (cost-efficiency) the highest dissemination potential, in order to popularise the EYE website <p>⇒ Youth 11-16 + Teachers and educators / youth workers</p>	<p>It can be used in a learning context; its resources can be shared and are attractive to its primary Focus Audience.</p> <p>The content of the website should be:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> ready-to-use, or at least easily adaptable to specific needs of Focus Audience specific (the current website provides general information only) easy to find – classified by level of environmental proficiency in order to reflect a wide range of competencies adapted to learning activities adapted to the needs of the specified focus audience (can be inserted into national school curricula and fill gaps in the online EE market) <p>To effectively combine all these elements, the Consultants recommend that the new website:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> act as a repository of local resources (well-adapted to the specific needs of each local EE market); and encourage user-generated content, which may result in the exchange of Best Practice. 	<p>It will allow content to be clearly classified and the user-friendliness issues mentioned during the Evaluation Phase to be effectively addressed.</p> <p>The web-portal is organised around 4 main 'pillars':</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> EU Environmental News (a section dedicated to EU-sourced content) Take Action! (a section dedicated to informing users about opportunities for involvement in environmental projects) Resources (a section offering a library of links which federates existing material and a digital library of videos, photos of projects, etc.), and Community (a common space, possibly a teachers' forum, to share and disseminate EE related information, including a project idea section) <p>The new web portal also tackles the main user-friendliness issues raised during the evaluation, i.e. home page with a clear overview of the site content, site map, internal search engine, menu with clearly divided sections, logically grouped pages and clear page titles, multiple routes to the same destination, fast loading speeds, easy access to the website for those with disabilities, original layout, intuitive navigation, easy, clear and complete contact information, and a virtual tour and/or expanded help section.</p>	<p>The website is:</p> <p>Useful thanks to:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> Downloadable factsheets Library of links to other online EE resources Digital library of photos and videos 'Measure your ecological footprint' application' Dictionary/glossary of environmental terms Quarterly newsletters for teachers <p>Interactive thanks to:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> content uploading/user-generated content rating system tagging system to better define the content that is being uploaded an online meeting point (forum) possibility to add comments posting videos/photos of own school/school groups 'ask the expert' section) <p>Entertaining thanks to:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> links to popular games on other sites or development of new and/or redevelopment of existing games on EYE 'activity packs' an animated character, which guides visitors through the site a mascot 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> The visual identity is distinctive, memorable and coherent – more modern colours and layout The website name/branding is easy to remember and 'catchy' (no need to change URL because most users find websites through search engines) The language selection corresponds to focus audience's needs and preferences (more serious tone) 	<p>It will develop its own online promotion strategy :</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> Capitalise on the existence of well-known, highly visited Environmental Education youth websites (online synergies strategy) The educational portals and (national and international) EE websites often visited by teachers and students can be linked to the EYE website Make use of the other Europa websites to promote the website (DG EAC, etc.) Make use of the endorsement potential of specific target groups and of other Commission Directorates-General Optimise the website's search engine indexation in all EU languages Promote the 'EYE project award for youth' and with it the sharing of good/best practices Self-promote <p>There are also some offline promotion strategies to develop around the website:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> Launch campaign Raise awareness of the site within the EC by informing or reminding other DGs that they can add content and links to the EYE site Establish partnerships with other actors/stakeholders in the field

Objectives	Focus Audience	Content	Structure	Tools and Features	Visual and Verbal Identity	Use and Promotion
<p>General Objective 3</p> <p>The website will achieve a high level of sectoral recognition, visibility and repeat traffic, if:</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> The selected target groups can influence other user groups. They want to disseminate content/functionalities or develop synergies The target groups are likely to become regular visitors (need this information) and are interested in frequently updated information Traffic is measured on a regular basis <p>⇒ Youth 11-16 + Teachers and educators/youth workers</p>	<p>It remains up-to-date and helps attract new audiences.</p> <p>This would require:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> Content which can be disseminated and shared on or via the site regular (weekly), top level updates (homepage) – the site will remain up-to-date if a repository format is adopted (allows low cost updating), which would also feature user-generated content the site to provide information on events and milestones in environmental protection at EU level, promote environmental campaigns 	<p>It provides a framework that makes updating easy and which can be readily adapted to new Internet trends.</p> <p>The advantages of a web-portal in this respect are that:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> user-generated content is easy to implement on a web-portal the layout allows easy addition or removal of content, which means the homepage can be regularly updated to show more recent information ('hot topics', new project opportunities, etc.), and the structure itself is adaptable, to better reflect new Internet trends or users' preferences. The workload required to add or remove a service is also minimal, thanks to this lighter format 	<p>It can attract repeat traffic and new users</p> <p>Thanks to following tools::</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> an EU news corner small scale surveys/competitions with prizes a 'topic of the month' rubric option to 'tell a friend' a mailing list for flash news only elect the most interesting project uploaded to the site's online library of teaching resources on the website and give a prize to the winner (the 'Environment for Young Europeans' project award') 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> A system to monitor new trends is set up The content is scrutinised (and moderated when user generated) in order to guarantee consistency and conformity with VVI 	<p>The promotion of the website will be an essential part of its development thanks to following activities:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> using its portal and its privileged position as a multi-generational, multi-lingual, cross-sectoral tool to identify new opportunities to promote the website using specific features to convert users into multipliers publishing new content and news updates on a dynamic homepage by using the web-portal to 'generate new content'