

Study visits programme for education and vocational training specialists and decision-makers 2012/13

Categories of themes

1. Encouraging cooperation between the worlds of education, training and work

1.1. Description

Europe 2020 strategy puts strong emphasis on education and training to promote ‘smart, sustainable and inclusive growth’ (Council of the European Union, 2010e). In the strategic framework for European cooperation in education and training after 2010, the Council of the European Union stresses that it is important to develop partnerships between education and training providers and businesses, research institutions, cultural actors and creative industries to promote innovation and increase **employability** and **entrepreneurial potential** of all learners (Council of the European Union, 2009a). Broader learning communities, involving representatives of civil society and other stakeholders, should be promoted to create a climate conducive to creativity and better reconciling professional and social needs, as well as individual wellbeing (Council of the European Union, 2009b).

The economic crisis facing Europe requires immediate and efficient measures that will aid long-term economic and social development, reinforce competitiveness, support employability and strengthen social cohesion. The European Commission in its communication, *A shared commitment for employment* (2009a), outlined three key priorities that should help Member States design and implement appropriate and effective employment policies: maintaining employment, creating jobs and promoting mobility; upgrading skills and matching labour market needs; and increasing access to employment.

Initial education and training provides the skills base to build on. The knowledge, skills and competences people acquire during initial education and training can help them move successfully into employment and later adjust to emerging requirements, working methods and jobs. The Council conclusions on **new skills for new jobs** (Council of the European Union, 2010d) reflect on how people can be better educated and trained to take up jobs that do not yet exist. The 2011 Cedefop’s skills forecast update for sectors and occupations suggests that demand for skills, as measured by formal qualifications, will increase, yet many young Europeans leave school without an upper secondary level qualification. Of job openings expected to arise by 2020, 32 million will require high qualifications, 36.5 million will require medium-level qualifications and 6.7 million will require low qualifications (Cedefop, 2011b). The skills in many current jobs will change and require people to update them continuously, in other cases people will need to adapt to new jobs.

It is important to make **education and training more relevant to the world of work**. To achieve this, it is necessary to encourage dialogue between education and training institutions at all levels - from schools to vocational, adult and higher educational institutions – and partners in the labour market, more specifically enterprises and employers (Council of the European

Union, 2009d). As highlighted in the Bruges communiqué on enhanced European cooperation in vocational education and training (VET), **partnerships between education and training providers, social partners**, enterprises, employment services and other stakeholders can create conditions for young people to acquire the knowledge, skills and competences to **integrate quickly into the labour market** and adjust to emerging working requirements (Bruges communiqué, 2010). This kind of cooperation can take different forms (Council of the European Union, 2009a), such as:

- creating education and training programmes based on learning outcomes that reflect the needs of the labour market;
- curriculum development aimed at developing key competences and complementing theoretical content with practical components from the world of business;
- work placements and internships of teachers and learners that make them familiar with a real work environment;
- participation of professionals and entrepreneurs in the teaching-learning process;

The European social partners have developed their own framework of actions for lifelong learning competence development and qualifications, but are also partners in the Commission's and countries' efforts to **make VET in Europe better and more attractive**. Social partners should be supported to play their part in organising, providing and financing training, but should also promote **workplace learning** improving employability prospects of workers and broadening access to lifelong learning (European Commission, 2010a). For lifelong learning to become a reality for all, irrespective of age and qualification levels, ordinary workplaces must become primary places of learning (Cedefop, 2011a).

Study visits will present approaches and examples of good practice on:

- (a) education and training's contribution to improving knowledge, skills and competences for the labour market;
- (b) analysing emerging skills needs and gaps in EU Member States labour markets and developing policies to address these;
- (c) designing and implementing activities such as transition from education and training to work, occupational guidance and workplace learning to increase employability;
- (d) incentives and initiatives developed at national and regional levels for education and training institutions to cooperate with external partners, including parents, municipalities, enterprises, social partners, NGOs, etc.;
- (e) national, regional and local examples of participative governance.

1.2. List of topics for study visits

- Transition from education and training to the world of work
- Workplace learning
- Integration of disadvantaged groups into the labour market
- Increasing attractiveness of VET

- Social partners' contribution to lifelong learning
- Cooperation between education and training institutions, enterprises and local communities.
- New skills for new jobs
- Fostering entrepreneurship and employability

1.3. Keywords

- Adult learning,
- apprenticeship,
- entrepreneurship,
- financing,
- key competences,
- leadership and management,
- lifelong guidance,
- older workers,
- school environment,
- skill needs,
- social inclusion,
- social partners,
- sustainable development,
- validation of non formal and informal learning,
- work placement.

2. Supporting initial and continuous training of teachers, trainers and education and training institutions' managers

2.1. Description

The strategic framework for European cooperation in education and training (Council of the European Union, 2009b) after 2010 reiterates the need for high quality teaching through adequate **initial teacher education** and **continuous professional development** and through making teaching an attractive career choice. Flexible training provision and investment must be provided to initial and continuing training for teachers and trainers due to the changing labour markets and working environments (Bruges communiqué, 2010). More attention should be given to induction and probation programmes to deal with shortages of teaching skills and large numbers of young teachers leaving the profession. Coherent **induction programmes** should offer professional, social and personal support for beginning teachers (European Commission, 2010 1, p.16-18).

Perception of the role of the teacher (trainer) has changed in recent years with more expectation from teachers as well as from schools in general. Key players in supporting the learning experience of learners, teachers and trainers need to take greater responsibility for updating and developing their own knowledge and skills (Council of the European Union, 2009c) and adapt their skills and working practices to a changing context. There is convergence in the roles of teachers and trainers: a trainer in a work-based setting will need more pedagogical competences and must play a supportive and mentoring role; while a teacher in a school will need, like a trainer, a good understanding of work practices (European Commission, 2010a).

Teachers need to work with more heterogeneous groups of students and improve integration of disadvantaged students into mainstream education and training. Teachers and trainers need to master, develop and apply new teaching and training approaches and reflective thinking. This also implies more individualised approaches to teaching and learning, good communication skills, methods of teamwork, democratic schooling management and supportive mechanisms for pupil assessment and school evaluation. Teachers should be more involved and active in school improvement processes.

New demands have made policy-makers and leaders of educational and training institutions look much more forward than before and changed **the role of school leaders** across Europe. School leaders nowadays are at the forefront and central actors of school improvement efforts. There is a need for effective leadership skills and competences (including financial management, ICT skills, staff motivation, quality assurance, communication, etc.) to embrace change and new roles. During the informal meeting of Ministers for Education in Gothenburg in September 2009, it was stressed that with students and teachers, school leaders should benefit from 'opportunities to share good practice and professional development across national boundaries' (Swedish Presidency of the European Union, 2009).

Improving quality and efficiency of education and training remains a strategic objective for European cooperation in education and training. Council conclusions on a strategic framework for cooperation (Council of European Union, 2009b) stressed the importance of improving

governance and leadership of education and training institutions and **developing effective quality assurance systems**.

Building quality includes capacity building of teachers, school leaders, trainers and training managers, policies to build bridges with parents, modernising curricula and broadening extra-curricular activities, improving infrastructure and establishing a respectful environment. Quality assurance mechanisms are important at all levels of education including assessing students' competences, institutional self-assessments, external and internal evaluations, transparency and validating results. Involving, for example, social partners and actors from the labour market ('learning communities') in evaluation and validation of results is becoming more and more frequent.

In vocational education and training, the Bruges communiqué emphasises the need to give high priority to quality assurance in European cooperation in vocational education and training for the period 2011-20 (Bruges communiqué, 2010). Quality assurance is necessary to build up common trust which will ease mobility and recognition of skills and competences between VET systems. Member States should establish by 2015 **quality assurance frameworks for VET providers**, which also applies to associated workplace learning in accordance with the EQAVET recommendation (European Parliament; Council of the European Union, 2009b).

Study visits will present developments and measures making teaching and training more attractive, improving leadership and raising quality by highlighting:

- (a) programmes designed to recruit and retain highly qualified staff in all educational and training professions;
- (b) the quality and competences of leaders of education and training providers;
- (c) ongoing professional development of teachers and trainers;
- (d) initiatives easing mobility of teachers and trainers;
- (e) measures to increase quality of education and training provision.

2.2. List of topics for study visits

- Quality assurance mechanisms in schools and training institutions
- Teachers' and trainers' initial training, recruitment and evaluation
- Teachers' and trainers' continuing professional development and career opportunities
- Leadership and management in schools and training providers

2.3. Keywords

- Autonomy (school or institution),
- evaluation (school or institution),
- leadership and management,
- quality assurance,
- status of teachers and trainers,
- teachers' and trainers' competences,
- teachers' and trainers' mobility,
- teachers' and trainers' qualifications.

3. Promoting acquisition of key competences throughout the education and training system

3.1. Description

The recommendation of the European Parliament and the Council on key competences for lifelong learning (European Parliament; Council of the European Union, 2006a) defined a framework combining knowledge, skills and attitudes which all individuals need for personal fulfilment, active citizenship, social inclusion and employment. It is a reference tool to support policy-makers, education and training providers, employers and learners.

Key competences are a priority for all age groups. Young people should acquire key competences by the end of initial education and training to a level that equips them for adult life and provides a basis for further learning and working life. Adults need to develop and update their key competences throughout their lives to adapt flexibly to a rapidly changing world.

Key competences are: communication in the mother tongue, communication in foreign languages, mathematical competence and basic competences in science and technology, digital competence, learning to learn, social and civic competences, sense of initiative and entrepreneurship, cultural awareness and expression.

The strategic framework for European cooperation in education and training (ET 2020) (Council of the European Union, 2009b) reinforced the need for everyone to acquire key competences, placing it as one of the strategic objectives **to improve creativity and innovation, including entrepreneurship** at all levels of education and training. Education for entrepreneurship, meaning a sense of initiative, ability to turn ideas into practice, creativity and self-confidence, should be encouraged and accessible to all VET students, across all curricula and fields of study, enabling practical experiences in enterprises, and involving experts from businesses (Council of European Union, 2010f). It should build awareness of self-employment as a career option and train them to start their own businesses. Entrepreneurship must become a normal part of the competence framework of teachers and trainers (European Commission, 2010a).

Recent research shows there is a trend across the EU towards **competence-based teaching and learning and a learning outcomes approach** (Council of the European Union, 2010a) that forms part of an innovative approach to teaching and learning. European countries have made good progress in developing school curricula with more emphasis on cross-curricular approaches and ‘real-life’ applications that support development of students’ key competences necessary for personal fulfilment, active citizenship and employability. Although improving literacy and basic skills still requires effort, **transversal competences** (digital competence, social skills, cooperation skills and learning skills) are gaining more and more attention. They are essential to people for adapting to various working environments and being active citizens. There is also growing demand from employers for these competences (Council of the European Union, 2010b).

The European year of voluntary activities promoting active citizenship 2011 supported efforts of the EU, Member States, local and regional authorities to create the conditions in civil society conducive to volunteering in the EU.

For the first time in 2010 the Council tackled the issue of **education for sustainable development (ESD)** integrating economic, social and environmental perspectives. It calls in its conclusions the Member States to mainstream sustainable development in all areas of education and training and to support ESD in their national lifelong learning strategies (Council of the European Union, 2010g).

Those attending study visits on these themes will get acquainted with measures taken by participating countries to develop key competences for young people and adults and promote creative and innovative approaches to education and training, such as:

- (a) national, regional, local policies to increase the level of key competences and support creativity and innovation;
- (b) national curricular reforms of or regional and local developments in school curricula;
- (c) specific initiatives and projects which promote development of key competences, creativity and innovation;
- (d) new approaches to organising learning and teaching;
- (e) innovative methods, learning environments, learning materials or assessment techniques.

3.2. List of topics for study visits

- Increasing literacy and numeracy levels
- Language teaching and learning
- Use of ICT in learning
- Education for entrepreneurship
- Education for active citizenship and sustainable development
- Developing creativity in learning and teaching
- Learning mathematics and science

3.3. Keywords

- Adult learning,
- communication in foreign languages,
- communication in the mother tongue,
- competences in science and technology,
- content and language integrated learning (CLIL),
- cultural awareness and expression,
- curriculum,
- digital competence,
- extra-curricular activities,
- health education,
- innovative approaches,
- intercultural education,
- learning to learn,

- mathematical competence,
- parents involvement,
- personalised learning,
- skill needs,
- social and civic competences,
- social inclusion,
- student assessment,
- sustainable development,
- volunteering,
- young people.

4. Promoting social inclusion and gender equality in education and training, including integration of migrants

4.1. Description

The strategic framework for European cooperation in education and training (ET 2020) (Council of the European Union, 2009b) sets promoting equity, social cohesion and active citizenship as a strategic priority for Member States until 2020. Education and training systems should aim to ensure that all learners — including those from disadvantaged backgrounds, those with special needs and migrants — complete their education, through, where appropriate, second-chance education and more personalised learning. By doing this, education and training systems contribute to reducing social inequalities and enable citizens to realise their full potential (Council of the European Union, 2011b).

Reducing the share of **early school leavers** to 10% from the current level of 14.4% in both general education and VET is one of the headline targets of Europe 2020 strategy. The Commission approved in 2011 an action plan that will help Member States to achieve this headline target by the end of the decade. (Council of the European Union, 2011a). VET in particular can contribute to reducing the percentage of early school leavers through a combination of both preventive and remedial measures for example, through labour market relevant VET, increased work-based learning and apprenticeships, flexible learning pathways, effective guidance and counselling, and by learning content and methods that acknowledge young people's lifestyles and interests, while maintaining high-level quality standards for VET (Bruges communiqué, 2010).

Access to pre-primary education is essential for a good start in life as it promotes children's sociability and lays the basis for further learning. It is especially important for children from families with low incomes, ethnic minorities and migrants.

Member States have introduced **alternative (more flexible) forms of education and training**, second-chance programmes, mechanisms for informing parents about absences and reduced costs by providing free course materials and transportation. Close cooperation between general education and vocational sectors and 'second-chance' schools for adults is important. For children with special needs, access is increasingly considered as being given the possibility to attend general or special education based on what provides the best learning possibilities for the individual child. At higher education level, free education is key as tuition fees may reduce access.

Member States should **develop diverse pathways through VET** to further learning and employment. They should also improve public training programmes for the unemployed and disadvantaged learners. The quality and relevance of such programmes can be improved by encouraging stakeholder partnerships at regional and local levels and by promoting private sector involvement.

All students should have an equal chance to succeed; success should not be dependent on circumstances outside the control of the pupil or student, such as the financial position of the family, parental education, parental occupational status, geographic location, ethnic and racial

identity, gender and disability. At compulsory school level, the possibility for pupils who drop out of school to get a ‘second chance’ to learn has also received considerable attention. The role of initial vocational training in equipping these pupils with skills, knowledge and qualifications is important for their integration into society. More initiatives are still needed in most Member States to reduce the number of early school leavers and fight inequity due to socioeconomic disadvantages. **Individualised support** for pupils at risk can include provision of personalised learning, counselling, mentorship and tutorship systems, welfare support and extracurricular activities in support of learning (Council of the European Union, 2010c).

Study visits will present developments and measures on the following:

- (a) developing and implementing measures to improve access to education and training for disadvantaged groups;
- (b) designing and carrying out activities to achieve equity.

4.2. List of topics for study visits

- Early learning opportunities
- Personalised learning approaches
- Measures to prevent early school leaving
- Equal opportunities for disadvantaged groups

4.3. Keywords

- Adult learning,
- drop-outs,
- education and training attainment,
- gender equity,
- lifelong guidance,
- migrants and minorities,
- older workers,
- pre-primary learning,
- social inclusion,
- special needs,
- volunteering.

5. Developing strategies for lifelong learning and mobility

5.1. Description

Making **lifelong learning and mobility** a reality is one of the strategic objectives for European cooperation in education and training after 2010 (Council of the European Union, 2009b). Most countries have made progress in defining unified and overarching lifelong learning strategies. Cooperation should address learning in all contexts – whether formal, non-formal or informal – and at all levels: from early childhood education and schools through to higher education, vocational education and training and adult learning. The Bruges communiqué on enhanced European cooperation in vocational education and training calls for more actions to ensure maximum access to lifelong learning so that people have opportunities to learn at any stage in life and by making routes into education and training more open and flexible (Bruges communiqué, 2010).

Exchanging information on different policy options can help advance reforms of national education and training systems and, with other common learning activities, progress towards the common objectives and benchmarks for lifelong learning. **Coherent and comprehensive lifelong learning strategies** integrating education, higher education, adult learning and VET still need to be implemented. A holistic approach connecting lifelong learning and VET with other policy areas such as macroeconomics, employment, competition, enterprise, research and innovation, and social policies is crucial.

Mobility of citizens, especially as part of education and training, helps promote a feeling of belonging to Europe, developing European awareness and emergence of European citizenship. More practically, it allows young people to improve their personal skills and employability, and teachers and trainers to broaden their experience and improve their skills. Finally, in an international economy, ability to educate oneself and work in a multilingual environment is essential for the competitiveness of the European economy. The lifelong learning programme supports exchanges and connections between people, institutions and countries.

The **youth on the move** initiative (Council of the European Union, 2010h) underlines the value of learning mobility and proposes that its benefits should be made more available to all young people. In line with it, new innovative approaches should be explored on how mobility in VET, particularly of apprentices, can be strengthened. The 2006 European quality charter for mobility (European Parliament; Council of the European Union, 2006b) provides guidance on mobility arrangements for learning or other purposes, such as professional improvement, to both young people and adults while the European Commission's green paper on promoting the learning mobility of young people (European Commission, 2009b) deals with issues from preparation until the follow up of a mobility period. It also addresses the main barriers and obstacles to mobility and asks for suggestions and examples of good practice to overcome them.

To promote mobility of European citizens as well as their qualifications and learning achievements, several common tools, principles and frameworks have been or are being developed at European level. They all aim to strengthen European cooperation and improve transparency, recognition and quality assurance in all sectors of education and training.

The **European qualifications framework (EQF, 2011)** is a common European reference framework which links countries' qualifications to make them more readable and understandable across different countries and systems in Europe. It has two principal aims: to promote citizens' mobility between countries and lifelong learning. The EQF also serves as a common European reference point for those international sector organisations that wish to develop their own qualifications across countries. More and more European countries are developing and implementing comprehensive **national qualifications frameworks (NQFs)** which cover all subsystems and which are closely – although not exclusively – related to EQF. An NQF is a tool supporting coherence of policy development and lifelong learning aiming at improving access, progression and recognition of learning outcomes.

Europass (2010) is a tool to make citizens' knowledge, skills and qualifications clearly and easily understood, and foster mobility in Europe. It consists of five documents: curriculum vitae, language passport, Europass mobility, certificate supplement and diploma supplement. According to the Bruges communiqué, a European Skills Passport will be developed as part of Europass by 2012, to help citizens record their skills gained during formal or non-formal learning experiences.

Transparency of qualifications and recognition of learning outcomes is further supported by tools that help learners transfer credits gained during learning periods in their own country or abroad. These are: the **European credit system for vocational education and training (ECVET)** (European Parliament; Council of the European Union, 2009a) for vocational education and training (VET) and the European credit transfer and accumulation system (ECTS) for higher education. In 2009, the European Parliament and Council adopted a recommendation on establishing a European credit system for vocational education and training (ECVET). The **European quality assurance reference framework for vocational education and training** (European Parliament; Council of the European Union, 2009b) was adopted by the European Parliament and Council in 2009 as a reference instrument to help authorities of Member States to promote and monitor continuous improvement of their national VET systems.

High quality **guidance and counselling services** support citizens' lifelong learning, career management and achievement of personal goals. Lifelong guidance contributes to achieving wider goals of full employment, high educational attainment and economic growth. In 2008, the Council of the European Union adopted a resolution on better integrating lifelong guidance into lifelong learning strategies (Council of the European Union, 2008d) that reinforced the role of lifelong guidance in European education, training and employment policy development and implementation.

Although Member States have achieved a lot of progress in lifelong learning strategies, very strong inequalities exist in learning participation for adults (Council of the European Union 2008a). One of the big challenges until 2020 is to increase participation in learning opportunities for the low skilled adults and in particular older workers. The European Parliament endorsed 2012 as the European year for active ageing and solidarity between generations aiming to create better job opportunities and working conditions for the growing number of older people in Europe. Member States should implement efficient **adult learning** systems that provide adults with key competences and increased labour market access.

Study visits will present developments on:

- (a) reforms in education and training, policy measures for implementing integrated lifelong learning strategies;
- (b) policy measures to increase adult participation in lifelong learning;
- (c) implementation of flexible learning pathways and transition between different parts of national systems;
- (d) initiatives and projects on learning mobility in different learning contexts;
- (e) initiatives and projects which promote the widest access to mobility for individuals;
- (f) developing and implementing qualifications frameworks with reference to the EQF;
- (g) recognition of the knowledge, skills and competences people acquire outside formal education systems, for example, at work, in voluntary activities or their family lives.

5.2. List of topics for study visits

- National and sectoral qualifications frameworks linked to EQF
- Tools to promote transparency of qualifications and mobility of citizens
- Validation of non-formal and informal learning
- Reforms in national education and training systems
- Developing links between VET and higher education
- Implementation of flexible learning pathways
- Increasing adult participation in education and training
- Lifelong guidance for learning and working
- Learning mobility in education and training

5.3. Keywords

- Adult learning,
- disadvantaged groups
- Europass,
- European credit system for vocational education and training (ECVET),
- European credit transfer system (ECTS),
- European qualifications framework (EQF),
- learners' mobility,
- learning outcomes,
- lifelong guidance,
- lifelong learning programme,
- low skilled,
- migrants and minorities,
- national qualifications frameworks,
- older workers,
- skill needs,
- social partners,
- teachers' and trainers' mobility,
- transparency of qualifications,
- validation of non-formal and informal learning,
- workers' mobility.

Appendix

Selected sources on policy at EU level

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