



Transparency of qualifications,
validation of non-formal and informal learning,
credit transfer.

Mobility Beyond Borders

The contribution of Transparency of Qualifications and Credit Transfer in VET

23 March 2007, Bucharest - Romania

WORKSHOP A “Quality tools for mobility”

QUALITY IN MOBILITY: BETWEEN POLITICAL AND SOCIAL RESPONSIBILITY

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I would like to start this afternoon session by a set of reflections, elaborated on the basis of the project experiences we heard about this morning and focused on the relation between quality of a mobility experience and transparency.

First reflection: on one hand, the actions which have been awarded a grant are the outcome of several integrated and yet different activities, which all strictly depend on a set of assumptions (external conditions or hexogenous factors); on the other hand, these actions have very seldom produced themselves tangible outputs.

Second reflection (*linked to the first one*) quality keeps to be a project feature which is not easy to identify and to measure. In other words, even if project design has been characterised by an increasing transparency in processes and a better/enhanced quantification of objectives, in many cases the final evaluation on the outcomes of training interventions remains mainly linked to mere indicators of conformity (correspondence between planned and implemented activities).

Third reflection, which introduces to the focus I would like to make, several studies have recently been finalised on the theme of quality as effectiveness and efficiency of a mobility experience (be it a placement or an exchange), as well as a set of devices and tools are now available which can support the processes of recognition, validation and *mise en transparence* of mobility experiences. A lot of work is still to be done, yet, concerning the dissemination and full exploitation of such arrangements. There are at least four typologies of potential beneficiaries for this:

- **the beneficiaries**, i.e. the trainees, which can maximise the results of the experience in terms of both personal growth and professional development;
- **the organisations**, which can reduce organisational problems and ensure a greater concentration of time and resources on content aspects, as well as on the consolidation of transnational networks (support to internalisation);
- **the evaluators**, who might better understand and assess the possible spin-offs on individuals, systems and organisations involved in the project;
- **the decision makers**, including social partners.

The pedagogical quality of mobility projects is therefore a key issue. As a matter of fact, the number of placements is still too low with respect to the needs and it is therefore necessary to ensure that the effects of the experiences are maximised not only at individuals but also at education and training systems level. Whenever there is a lack of policies supporting transnational mobility, as in Italy, the opportunities offered by such a Programme as Leonardo da Vinci with its opportunities become essential. Qualitatively significant results could attract an increase of investment, also coming from other financial sources (national and European ones) to support transfer and application of Leonardo practices.

In the last years, the question was raised on the effectiveness of the available tools and devices in order to:

- evaluate the coherence of projects with Programme's objectives (promote skills and competences in initial vocational training, in order to facilitate integration and reintegration into the labour market; improve the quality of continuing vocational training and access to it, and support lifelong learning; promote and enhance the contribution of VET to innovation);
- evaluate the complementarity with other relevant policies, as well as the contribution of projects to the achievement of transversal objectives such as equal opportunities and social inclusion;
- carry out an evaluation focused not only of conformity, but also an assessment on the potential effectiveness of projects with respect to the objective of improving the training supply and of promoting high-quality mobility projects;
- verify, also *in itinere* and *ex post*, the effective achievement of planned objectives.

What emerged was that the used set of evaluation tools were substantially ineffective and inappropriate, and need to be integrated with criteria, indicators, descriptors and related measurement tools suitable to clearly meet the obligations in terms of political and social responsibilities.

In February 2006, when defining the contents and modalities of implementation of the new integrated Programme on LLL 2007-2013, the European Commission

introduces in this way a synthetic document on the reflections concerning dissemination and valorisation of mobility projects:

"..... Looking at the results of mobility projects, which are mostly intangible in the form of experience, skills and knowledge gained by participants or beneficiaries, some more tangible results are also seen in the form of changes to systems, organisations or companies involved in mobility projects. Mobility, therefore, does not only touch the individual: home and host organisations (companies, schools, universities, etc.) can benefit and be changed by mobility actions..."¹.

This sentence, integrally quoted, includes all the key words of the scientific debate on quality of transnational mobility.

It is clear that there is a gap between the evaluation approach used until the late Nineties (for instance up to the end of such programmes as PETRA) - which was focused on the effects of the experience only at the level of beneficiaries' *personal development*, with a progressive focus of the components linked to the acquisition of meta-competences, relational capacities (socialisation, awareness, self-confidence, tolerance, flexibility, stressability, sensitiveness to the inter-cultural dimension and to diversity, etc.) - and the current approach, which considers, when evaluating the project as a whole, other areas of possible spin-offs and above all the improvement of matching between accessibility and employability.

This kind of impacts or spin-off effects are present without any doubt on hosting and sending organisations, on primary and secondary groups of beneficiaries, on learning facilitators such as trainers and tutors, on educational and employment systems which are called to weight the value of the experience achieved within educational pathways or working contracts.

The experience of transnational mobility is therefore transversal for its effects on human capital but also and above all for its the social and economical spin-offs.

¹ Mobility – Dissemination and exploitation in DG EAC Programmes – Final Recommendations EAC/C/3/MMO D (2006)

This kind challenge involves not only technicians and researchers but also policy makers and planners, and concerns the assessment of both learning and impact of policies / return of investments.

In the same document, the European Commission also added that it is worth:

- *“Measuring the changes brought about at individual, institutional/organisational, professional, systems and sector level.*
- *Improving the quality of mobility projects.*
- *Improving the quality of placements and exchanges.*
- *Improving the quality of results.*
- *Promoting best practice which can feed new projects and encourage greater participation in mobility projects (capitalise in investments).*
- *Disseminating and giving visibility to mobility projects and project outcomes (awareness-raising).*

Mobility will play an important role in the new DG EAC Lifelong Learning Programme. Because of the considerable financial investment made, mobility should not only be encouraged and promoted, but the rewards and dividends paid by experience in another European country, be it at individual, organisational or system level, should be made visible. Exploiting best practice should help increase the quality of projects and, ultimately, placements and exchanges. Dissemination of best practice should also contribute to ensuring increased visibility and awareness of best practice among sectors and organisations involved or interested in mobility...Also, by providing tools where promoters and organisations can readily identify projects or activities carried out in specific areas, timeframes involved in creating projects can be significantly reduced. Ultimately, by disseminating and exploiting results European investment in mobility is seen to be well invested.”²

² Doc. cit., pag. 2

On the basis of these reflections, the European Commission has identified a set of recommendations, organised in **4 macroareas**: (1) *policy*, (2) *implementation by key actors*, (3) *development of shared tools and arrangements* and (4) *increased attention on mobility*.

With respect to policy, recommendations focus on the impact of transnational placements and exchanges, while highlighting also the relevant issue of how difficult it is to measure such an impact. Moreover, given all the hindrances already clearly identified in the EC Green Book almost ten years ago and still existing, the need to ensure the quality of planned and implemented mobility initiatives seems also to be increased by the problem of not making an already “compromised” situation even more serious with little significant actions.³

To sum up, the key elements to be underlined at a political level are the following:

- **Enhance and improve the *ex ante* selection of projects**, by considering such criteria as innovation, long-term effects, impact on systems and organisations, dissemination strategy and mainstreaming;
- **Increase operational flexibility** during project management and implementation, by allowing *in itinere* adjustments of work programmes (flows, durations, destinations);
- **Link mobility experiences to pilot projects** or to broader experimentations, even locally based, so as rely on a significant set of materials and tools and exploit possible synergies;
- **Improve the involvement of enterprises**, by establishing networks and links which are permanent - not occasional.

At political level, it also has to be mentioned that the mobility experience should at least be traced and that, to this purpose the use of such arrangements as Europass, the European Credits Transfer System and the future European Qualifications Framework (EQF) has to be promoted and enhanced.

³ "In particular, negative impact should be measured as a way of identifying and removing barriers and obstacles to mobility" doc.cit.

At implementation level, the EC has identified 4 typologies of key actors and for each of these the behaviours and objectives to be pursued have also been identified: *National Agencies, Enterprises and Social partners, Schools, Universities, NGOs and Networks.*

The National Agencies have the task to:

- conceive and develop tools and resources to disseminate and support the exploitation of mobility projects' results;
- constantly monitor and evaluate projects, even after the formal conclusion of financed activities;
- cooperate with national and international institutions and bodies which are involved in the implementation of Europass, European Credit Transfer System and EQF;
- set up and promote preliminary activities for the implementation of mobility programmes (for instance, by supporting exchanges of trainers and study visits);
- allocate a part of the resources for accompanying measures to studies and analyses to better understand and valorise the set of planned and achieved results.

Enterprises and social partners, from their part, have to increase their active involvement.

This objective can be pursued through a strategy including:

- specific incentives for disseminating and valorising good practices;
- actions aiming at emphasising the "return of investment" deriving from placements and exchanges, in particular those based on already validated experiences.

The involvement of *Schools, Universities and NGOs* should be promoted by valorising already existing experiences.

Moreover, *Networks* have to be enhanced, with particular reference to theme-based and sector-based networks, with the specific aim of testing and validating the results and effects of mobility programmes as well as of identifying and removing possible hindrances in order to ensure their further development.

A hypothesis could be the establishment of "*Think Tanks*" or common intermediate bodies among the networks in order to centralise some services (information services, administration, etc.).

As for the development of shared tools and arrangements, this action is extremely important to increase the accessibility to resources by all potential beneficiaries and enhance the visibility of projects and results. As an example, these tools could be databases, starting from EVE experience (*European Virtual Space for exchange*), which could facilitate the development of relations among projects promoters.

Moreover, it could be helpful to pursue a strategy encompassing a centralised and shared production of tools such as handbooks for planning mobility programmes, guidelines for implementing preparatory actions, modules for language training or support to socialisation, didactic and information material.

Finally, the objective of ***increasing the attention and the focus on the importance and value of transnational mobility***, could be achieved through:

- the organisation of sectoral events, fairs, showcases and seminars (for instance considering that 2006 has been the European Year of Mobility at Work);
- an increased exploitation of those media which so far have been little involved (Broadcasters, Publishing houses, libraries, pedagogical resource centers, etc).

The implementation of mobility projects within the Leonardo da Vinci Programme II (which has involved, as for placements, youths in initial training or entering the labour market, young active workers or seeking for a job, young graduates or students of higher education institutes or, as for exchanges, trainers, human resources managers, language experts or social partners) can allow the achievement of some strategical objectives which are recalled in several national and Community programmes:

- increase the employability or adaptability of beneficiaries;
- enhance their professional and language competences;
- support, even indirectly, the establishment and/or development of a European system for the recognition of qualifications, for validation of competences and credit transfer.

If we take as an assumption that any project can contribute to the achievement of general objectives is proportionally to the quality it expresses, we implicitly assume that the quality of a mobility project can be understood and assessed by referring mainly to:

- the training contents delivered to beneficiaries (internal effectiveness);
- its correspondence to the priorities of development identified in their reference context (external effectiveness).

This methodological approach is in line with the recent debate on the quality of training activities, but is mainly justified because the mobility projects we are talking about are financed in the framework of a Programme which is aiming to concur, together with other Community tools and initiatives, to the achievement of employment and "system" objectives established by the European strategy for Employment and by several EU documents.

This is the starting point for the work we are asked to carry out today, also on the basis on the practices we have already heard about this morning thanks to our colleagues.