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EUNEC statements on the recommendations of the study 'MoVE-iT: Obstacles to Mobility in VET'

Introduction

Mobility is at the heart of the European project and is strongly linked to the Lisbon objectives for 2010. Mobility in the education and training sector is of particular significance.

Using the open method of coordination, several projects have strong links with mobility, for example; EQF¹, ECTS², ECVET³, Europass⁴

The European Commission is particularly interested in geographical mobility in initial vocational education and training. Mobility can take place both in compulsory education and training and more specifically in post compulsory vocational education. However, in practice there remain significant obstacles to mobility. Therefore, the European Commission and the European Parliament a large scale project with three components: Firstly, a study on the feasibility of ECVET (ECVET reflector). Secondly, a study on the implementation of ECVET (ECVET connection) and thirdly, a study on the obstacles to mobility for apprentices (MoVE-iT)⁵.

EUNEC was invited by the contractors of the MoVE-iT study to participate in their research and to make an important contribution outlining obstacles to mobility. The study on mobility obstacles in VET was awarded to PricewaterhouseCoopers. They carry out this study in conjunction with CINOP (Centre for Innovation and Training – 's-Hertogenbosch, The Netherlands). The general objective was to conduct an in-depth study into initial vocational-training methods across Europe (including Member States, EEA countries, the candidate and pre-accession countries), with a focus on mobility. The study aimed to

¹ European Qualifications Framework

² European Credit transfer system

³ European Credit system for Vocational Education and Training

⁴ Europass has been established by the [Decision No 2241/2004/EC](#) of the European Parliament and the Council of 15 December 2004 on a single transparency framework for qualifications and competences.

⁵ You can find more information on www.ecvet.net.

identify the obstacles, preventing mobility from improving and developing work-skills, and to suggest practical solutions to overcome these obstacles. The project was officially titled 'MoVE-iT'⁶.

On 9-10 November 2006, EUNEC organised together with the MoVE-iT project team a conference on this issue. The objective of this EUNEC conference in Brussels, with a large number of EUNEC members and experts coming from 15 countries, was to provide some critical remarks and statements on the recommendations of the study.

EUNEC statements

This research project commissioned by the European Commission and the European Parliament has very ambitious aims and goals. EUNEC has the impression that the time schedule imposed for this research project was rather unrealistic. We regret for instance the numerous rough estimates in the national results and the lack of clear references within the national data. This negatively impacts upon the study's reliability.

EUNEC recognises the work of the contractors on this study who provided concrete and practical recommendations, which are formulated in the discussion paper. We state that these conclusions represent a useful starting point for reflection on innovative mobility policy. However, EUNEC states that the recommendations of the MoVE-iT study are rather general, making it difficult to translate into national policy.

Europe has a diverse range of VET systems. This is one factor contributing to the fact that data that are insufficient and difficult to interpret in places. The data only give us some indications. EUNEC thinks that mobility in IVET⁷ can only be promoted by adapting the recommendations to the specific local, regional and national situations. Translating the recommendations into country or region specific actions will be necessary. The results of the MoVE-iT study can therefore be used to promote awareness, at a policy level, of mobility issues. There are several examples of good practice listed in the report, which may prove helpful for countries or institutions aiming to develop sustainable mobility strategies.

1 Global remarks

1.1 A wider view on mobility

EUNEC wants to address the problem of mobility in a wider context. Mobility can be local, regional or international, with exchanges between European countries and regions. This reflects the scope of this MoVE-iT study. There is mobility within a country, between regions and, at a local level, companies, in the framework of sectors or even between sectors. Mobility is paramount in a knowledge society and in the wider context of lifelong learning. EUNEC thinks that the issue of mobility deserves greater attention of policymakers. Mobility is a key issue towards achieving the Lisbon objectives. There must be equal regard given to mobility in education and training. EUNEC acknowledges that the scope of mobility in education and training is greater than that examined by the MoVE-iT study. Transnational mobility should lead to a win-win situation, with benefits for all the actors involved. We would also like to stress that some countries have some reservations about increased mobility in the field of VET, with concerns over potential

⁶ You can find more information on: <http://room.projectcoordinator.net/projectweb/435bc339b0795/Index.html>

⁷ Initial vocational education and training

'brain drain' of talented young people. However, other countries have difficulties promoting mobility amongst their VET students. We are convinced that the proposed recommendations of the MoVE-iT study can promote the development of more successful mobility strategies.

EUNEC also wants to emphasise that mobility should be relevant both in the context of the labour market and in education and training. EUNEC emphasises that the perspective for mobility in general, in initial vocational education and training and in lifelong learning will be different.

1.2 Target group of the MoVE-iT study

It is not always very clear what is the real target group of this study. The definition of 'apprenticeship' is very diverse in the different member states of the Union.

The study focuses on ISCED level 3. It is clear that this level is not linked to any particular age. However, we have the impression that the real intention of the study is to enhance mobility of the IVET students between 14 and 21 years of age. Therefore EUNEC suggests that the target group should be specified more clearly in the introduction to the study.

Mobility has a different perspective for learners in initial vocational training (IVET) at secondary and at higher education levels. The position of IVET in lifelong vocational education and training is not specified either. Mobility in lifelong learning for adults, for instance, is an almost unexplored area.

When the focus is the target group of 14-21 year olds, it is important to examine the specific psychological and emotional barriers towards mobility of this group. Specific research on the pupils' and parents' attitudes will be necessary. With this in mind, there should be more respect for the free choice of the individual and one's family.

EUNEC wants to stress the fact that the attitude of teachers and trainers is crucial if Europe wants to enhance mobility in the age group 14-21. When we are able to broaden the perspective and to enhance the professional mobility of teachers and trainers, the barriers and obstacles can be removed. EUNEC recommends continuing and intensifying the European mobility actions among this target group, as the multiplier effect on students and apprentices will be very significant.

Moreover, we want to emphasise that there has to be special attention given to vulnerable groups of pupils, students, learners and apprentices. EUNEC strongly believes in the philosophy of equal opportunities. Europe must avoid promoting an elitist mobility.

1.3 Why geographical mobility of apprentices?

It is important to examine the reasons why pupils and companies should opt for more mobility. EUNEC wants to emphasise that short and long stays abroad offer both considerable benefits and possibilities for the pupils. It is clear that education and training institutions and individuals should make a distinction between the objectives of long and short periods of mobility.

EUNEC states that both the development of social and personal competences and the enhancement of personal professional skills are important issues. Both dimensions are the most crucial motives for mobility. Therefore they both need specific attention during the development of mobility programmes.

It is clear that institutions involved in mobility (education and training institutes, companies) need to enhance the quality of the learning outcomes, namely both the academic and professional skills. To valorise the learning experience in mobility there will be a greater need for coaching and counselling during the stay. Institutions should pay more attention to preparation and debriefing of experiences abroad. If there are collective costs, there should be collective benefits. Mobility cannot be reduced to benefits for an individual.

1.4 Levers for mobility: macro instruments for validation of learning experiences

If we want to raise the level of mobility in IVET, EUNEC asks that European policy makers should develop an integrated policy on mobility and reinforce the link with recent developed European tools on transparency of qualifications. The integration of the European Qualifications Framework, national qualifications frameworks, credit systems (ECVET – ECTS), Europass into mobility policies is of an invaluable significance. We would also recommend that the study should pay more attention to other important European documents on validation of informal and non-formal learning⁸, on quality management⁹, on guidance¹⁰, on mobility¹¹, ...

2 Recommendations

2.1 A realistic implementation of mobility

2.1.1 European measures

There is an absolute need for more security on the legal status of apprentices who are taking part in mobility.

EUNEC also wants to point out that a large part of the target group of the study involves minors. This can cause certain legal problems for apprentices abroad.

2.1.2 National/regional level

Action plans for mobility should be integrated into a more global and strategic policy on the modernisation of VET systems at national or regional level.

2.1.3 Reinforce the focus on the importance of the school/training centre level.

Schools or training centres should develop a pedagogy and culture of mobility. They should integrate mobility into their mission statement. This way mobility can become a part of a global pedagogic concept with emphasis on language learning and on intercultural competences.

Schools and training centres should pay more attention to the preparation and the follow-up of a stay abroad. EUNEC recommends mobility becomes part of curricula. Mobility is

⁸ Conclusions of the Council and the representatives of the Governments of the Member States meeting within the Council on Common European Principles for the identification and validation of non-formal and informal learning (May 2004)

⁹ Quality Assurance in Vocational Education and Training. Education Council Conclusions (May 2004) European Cooperation in Quality Evaluation in School Education. Recommendation of the European Parliament and of the Council (February 2001)

¹⁰ Resolution of the Council and the representatives of the Governments of the Member States meeting within the Council on Strengthening Policies, Systems and Practices in the field of Guidance throughout life in Europe (May 2004)

¹¹ Transnational Mobility within the Community for Education and Training purposes: European Quality Charter for Mobility. Commission Proposal for a Recommendation of the European Parliament and of the Council (May 2006)

not an isolated objective. It should be integrated into the whole of learning outcomes of a professional training.

Schools and training centres should transform innovative piecemeal policies into a more structural approach. Therefore they need (financial) support from the European and national authorities. Mobility of teachers and trainers should be an essential element of their professional development.

Networks of schools create win-win situations. They can share information on working places, on experiences, on methodologies etc. Therefore it is very important that mobility programmes should support the already existing networks of school. Now the existence of these networks, created for instance within the Leonardo da Vinci programme, is often limited to a short period or simply to the duration of the project.

2.1.4 Cooperation with all relevant stakeholders

It is necessary to involve social partners and sectors in this discussion. In some countries, the involvement of employers should be seen as a long-term perspective. In other countries employers are already crucial stakeholders in IVET. Therefore it is necessary that each country should look at its own situation and take the necessary steps in creating real alliances between employers, schools and training centres and all other stakeholders involved.

Within the framework of mobility in IVET, EUNEC wants to emphasise the importance of the involvement of parents. When we want to raise the mobility rates of pupils in IVET, we often need to convince their parents of the mobility benefits.

We want also to emphasise the importance of existing and well functioning international networks and institutions. It is of no use to create new networks or institutions if the existing ones could be supported better. EUNEC recommends a more effective support of existing networks, naturally with an adapted quality control. These networks can play an important role to stimulate greater mobility in IVET.

2.1.5 The focus on the individual?

In IVET the role of teachers, schools and training centres is more important than in higher education. Therefore EUNEC suggests focusing on the institutions instead of on an individual responsibility. Mobility in IVET should be a collective rather than an individual project.

Individual free movement might serve as an additional solution. Although individual grants are not a miracle solution to enhance mobility, EUNEC recognises that for some apprentices they can be an effective means of support. In some countries of the European Union, IVET apprentices are working in companies and no longer go to school. Therefore national or regional actions should be related to the different obstacles in the different countries.

Internet, data bases and electronically provided information can be a complementary tool to reach the target group. For that reason, EUNEC wants to emphasise that it is necessary that we keep working on the development of basic and advanced ICT skills for this specific target group. EUNEC finds it important that the communication strategies should be integrated into a global approach on the IVET modernisation. It should also be useful to use communication tools, which are appropriate for youngsters (peer group learning, appropriate use of the media).

2.1.6 Using and valorising existing networks

EUNEC wants to reiterate once again the importance of using and valorising existing networks in the implementation of the recommendations of the study. We think there is a lot of experience on mobility available which can be used to build new strategies towards an increased mobility in VET. EUNEC wants to point out that its own network has gained a lot of experience in European issues and could play an irreplaceable role in the development of new strategies. EUNEC also plays an important role in the dissemination of information and results to all stakeholders involved in education and training.

2.2 Implementation requires a good balance between top - down and bottom-up approaches for innovation

In its statements on implementation of educational change (Malta, May 2005), EUNEC formulated some interesting thoughts, which can also be useful for the implementation of the results of this study. In conclusion, we cite some of the most important statements:

The sense of ownership is important in thinking on innovation; the whole education sector should be involved in setting up an innovation strategy from the conceptualisation to implementation and evaluation.

Educational change balances between societal demands and the educational needs of the learners. This calls for decision-making on a participative basis. Within the global lines put forward by the decision makers, schools should be entitled to adopt the innovation to the needs of their learners.

In order to stimulate the sense in ownership of the educational field, EUNEC emphasises the roles and the responsibilities of the different levels of decision makers: the European level (open method of coordination), the national / regional education policy, the local perspective and the school level. Between those levels, it would be useful to respect the principle of subsidiarity.

If the innovation is to reach the classroom level, Member States should go further than an administrative reporting process. Within the Member States, there is a need for a national/regional and concerted innovation action plan. In that plan, the focus should be on setting clear policy goals, allowing schools to bring in their own concerns, values, needs and solutions in the local approach. We need a balance between steering mechanisms (financial incentives, inspectorate and accountability, standards) and the recognition of the autonomy and the ownership of school teams. In the setting of goals the national/regional level(s) should guarantee the principles of equal opportunities for all children with respect for diversity (multicultural, multilinguistic) and social cohesion.

EUNEC emphasises the importance of consultative procedures, involving all educational stakeholders at every stage of the decision-making process (at European, national and local levels). We can define three stages in decision-making processes where consultative bodies have a role to play: policy preparation, policy implementation and policy evaluation. This participative approach constitutes the basis to enhance the sense of ownership of those responsible for the implementation of a change process. Education councils, as platforms for a broader consultation of educational actors and broader society, should become privileged players in the setting up of educational renewal.

The national/regional policy should enhance the policy-making capacity of schools by providing support/learning platforms and rethinking teacher education and training.

Projects offer an opportunity for peer learning. Schools and teachers have the opportunity to learn from colleagues experiencing (or having experienced) the same difficulties and obstacles. Projects generally are useful in the knowledge transfer initiation phase. The knowledge transfer from projects towards other schools has to be carefully developed, eg. by setting up school improvement partnerships. However, counsellors should focus more on the school building capacity than on the content and the goals of the innovation as such. From a national/regional perspective, the results of successful projects offer an evidence based concept that can be translated into balanced steering mechanisms, still leaving some autonomy to schools to set up their own innovative approaches.

Educational changes need to be adequately evaluated and assessed. This offers a basis for learning and for knowledge building. We emphasize the relevance and the need to investigate the feasibility of formulating benchmarks on building knowledge, on permanent innovation and on educational change at a system level.