



## BRIEFING NOTE

# Crossing frontiers to share expertise

## Study visits for education and vocational training specialists are supporting European cooperation and policy development

Europeans have a long history of using travel and crossing frontiers as a way of learning. Between the 17th and 19th centuries wealthy Europeans would undertake the Grand Tour visiting other countries as part of their education. Now, in the European Union (EU), travelling to learn is no longer for a privileged few, but is widely encouraged in many different ways.

Study visits (Box 1) provide an opportunity for education and vocational education and training (VET) experts to travel and learn. They bring together decision-makers and practitioners from different countries with different backgrounds to discuss issues of common interest and to share experience and expertise.

The impact of study visits on policies and practice is high. Through common learning, dissemination of good practice and stronger European cooperation, each visit can contribute to improving education and training policies at local, regional, national and European levels.

The effects of study visits can also last well beyond the few days that the experts are together. Many keep in touch and network after the visit. Nearly a third of experts start to work on joint initiatives and projects.

Before 2008, there was one study visits programme for education experts and another for VET experts. The growing links between education and training and the increasing importance of lifelong learning saw the separate study visits brought together under the EU's lifelong learning programme <sup>(1)</sup> in 2008.

Cedefop had successfully managed study visits for VET experts for over 20 years, building up a reputation for visits of high quality both in terms of content and organisation. Wishing to draw on this experience and know-how, the European Commission invited Cedefop to coordinate the new much larger consolidated study visits for experts in education, VET and lifelong learning.

<sup>(1)</sup> Council of the European Union. Council Decision establishing an action programme in the field of lifelong learning (1720/2006/EC). *Official Journal of the European Union*, L 327/45, 24.11.2006.

### Box 1: What is a study visit?

A study visit lasts three to five days. About 10-15 education and training experts from various countries with different backgrounds come together to share their knowledge, experience and expertise and discuss a theme of common interest.

Experts discuss issues such as policy implementation in the different countries. They visit education and training institutions in the host country and meet policy-makers, social partners, teachers, students and other practitioners. Participants also establish contacts for future cooperation and take ideas back home.

Study visits are part of the EU's lifelong learning programme. They are organised in line with the September to June academic year. Some 33 countries take part; the 27 EU Member States along with Iceland, Lichtenstein, Norway, Switzerland, Croatia and Turkey.

#### Interested in going on a study visit?

Applications for study visits between March and June 2012 are open from mid-July until 14 October 2011.

Check the study visits website:

<http://studyvisits.cedefop.europa.eu/>

### Study visits themes

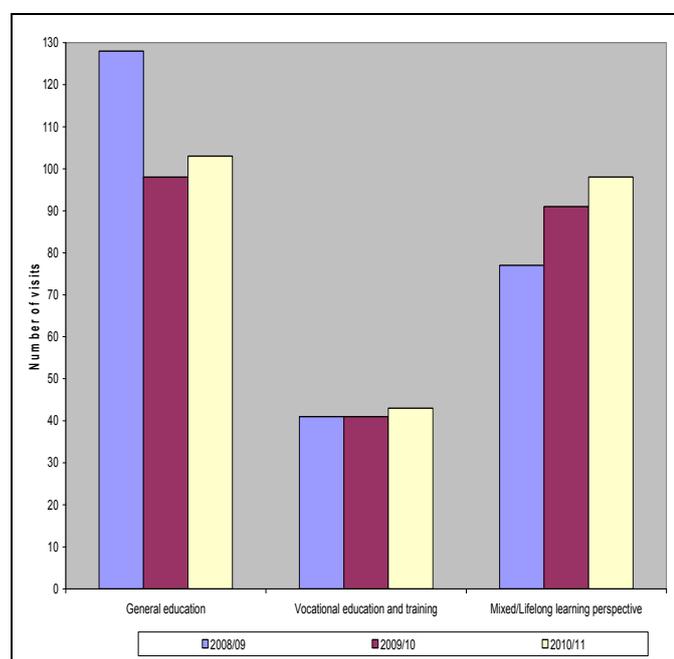
The value of study visits lies in their relevance to contemporary issues. Great effort goes into ensuring that themes discussed during the visits are fully aligned with European policy priorities for education, VET and lifelong learning.

In 2008, Cedefop led a working group of decision-makers, social partners and education and VET experts to develop study visit themes. In 2010, the themes were updated after the launch of the Europe 2020 strategy and changes to the education and training 2020 cooperation framework.

Since 2008, study visits have increasingly encouraged experts to see VET, general, higher and adult education as related parts of lifelong learning as a whole, rather than separate issues.

There has been a steady increase in study visits taking a comprehensive lifelong learning approach from around 30% of visits in 2008/09 to a little over 40% in 2010/11 (Figure 1). The number of VET related study visits has remained relatively stable, accounting for around 17% of visits.

Figure 1: Number of study visits by type, 2008/09 to 2010/11



Among the study visits themes currently discussed are:

- acquisition of key competences by all, including creativity, innovation and entrepreneurship;
- improving access, equity, quality and efficiency of education and training;
- keeping teaching and training more attractive improving educational leadership;
- education and training for employability;
- promoting mobility in lifelong learning;
- implementing common European tools and principles for lifelong learning and trends in lifelong learning strategies;
- cooperation of education and training with the world of work and local communities.

## Study visits participants

Study visits have proved to be very popular (Table 1). In 2010/11, two selection rounds were introduced to improve planning and increase participation in study visits for some target groups. This has led to more applications and higher participation by social partners and fewer cancellations overall.

Table 1: Study visits 2008/09 to 2010/11 - key data

	2008/2009	2009/2010	2010/2011
<b>Study visits</b>	246	230	244
<b>Countries hosting study visits</b>	29	29	29
<b>Participants (Applicants)</b>	2 532 (4 686)	2 358 (4 573)	2 740 (5 789)
<b>Participants' countries</b>	30	33	31

Study visits reach many different education and VET decision-makers and practitioners (Table 2).

Head teachers and teacher trainers account for around 25% of participants. Directors of education and training institutions, guidance and validation centres make up 15.6% and representatives of local, regional and national authorities 11.5%.

Study visits also offer a unique opportunity to social partners to become involved in European cooperation in lifelong learning. Participation by social partners has increased from 4.5% in 2008 to 6% in 2010.

Several visits every year are for policy makers with high-level responsibility at national, regional and local level. For these visits the European Commission and Cedefop provide extra support concerning the content and focus of the discussion.

Table 2: **Study visits 2008/09 to 2010/11: Participants by category**

Category	2008/09	2009/10	2010/11
Head teachers, teacher trainers	634	591	735
Directors of education and vocational training institutions, centres or providers, guidance centres, validation or accreditation centres	461	371	418
Representatives of local, regional and national authorities	252	265	293
Pedagogical or guidance advisers	258	189	224
Heads of departments	186	167	211
Social partners	115	147	164
Educational and vocational training inspectors	139	142	140
Representatives of education and training networks and associations	90	85	96
Researchers	59	83	95
Other	338	318	364
<b>Total</b>	<b>2 532</b>	<b>2 358</b>	<b>2 740</b>

Since 2008/09, senior policy makers have discussed issues such as regional cooperation, training and developing civil servants, quality assurance in education and training institutions and continuing professional development for teachers and trainers.

Topics for discussion in 2011/12 include the role of social partners in developing national qualifications frameworks and entrepreneurship in VET.

### Quality counts

Cedefop helps ensure that study visits achieve their objectives efficiently and effectively (Box 2). An organisers' handbook<sup>(2)</sup> and a participant's companion<sup>(3)</sup>, prepared by Cedefop, the European Commission and national agencies give guidance to create the right conditions for the success of each visit.

Cedefop also provides an overview of key issues and developments at European level and sources for further reading on the theme of each visit. To disseminate findings and promote study visits to potential applicants, Cedefop has developed a communication guide for national agencies.

Experience shows that study visits organisers do a very good job. In 2009/10, 97% participants said they were very satisfied with their study visit.

### Box 2. Role of Cedefop in study visits

Working closely with the European Commission and national agencies, Cedefop works to ensure the high quality of study visits and that the themes reflect the latest developments in education and training in Europe.

In particular, Cedefop promotes study visits. It coordinates proposals for visits and prepares the catalogue which sets out the context, content and objectives of each visit. Cedefop also coordinates calls for applications and allocates participants, who are all selected by national agencies, to specific visits to ensure a balance of countries, expertise and gender.

Cedefop also monitors study visits, disseminates their results and assesses their impact on education and training policies and practice.

Every year Cedefop holds knowledge sharing seminars for new and experienced study visit organisers to discuss how to improve study visit content, organisation and the dissemination of results.

<sup>(2)</sup> <http://www.cedefop.europa.eu/EN/publications/17955.aspx>

<sup>(3)</sup> <http://www.cedefop.europa.eu/EN/publications/17953.aspx>

## Disseminating results

Study visit findings are summarised in group reports <sup>(4)</sup> which outline common approaches, challenges and potential solutions. Cedefop analyses the reports and puts them online to share them with other education and training policy makers and practitioners.

Group reports are a basis for synthesis seminars <sup>(5)</sup> (Box 3) organised each year by Cedefop to summarise, validate and promote study visit findings on selected themes.

### Box 3: Study visit synthesis seminars

#### 2010: Quality and efficiency

Summarising around 80 visits in 2008/09, presentations from 15 countries provided insights into the challenges faced by: learners in acquiring social and civic competences and learning foreign languages; teachers and trainers in developing those competences; and for school leaders in creating communities of learning. Outcomes of the seminar were published in *Better competences through better teaching and leading: Findings from study visits 2008/09* <sup>(6)</sup>.

#### 2011: Young people and the labour market

Summarising around 60 the visits in 2009/10, presentations from 21 countries emphasised: the importance of guidance and counselling for young people, but also of raising awareness of the benefits of investing in VET for employers; opportunities to combine learning with work experience; introducing young people to entrepreneurship early to develop entrepreneurial thinking and skills <sup>(7)</sup>.

## Positive impact

A survey of participants in 2008/09 (Figure 3) showed a greater awareness of European developments among those responsible for shaping and implementing national, regional or local education and training policies. They were also more aware of opportunities for further European cooperation. Using contacts they made during the visit, around 30% of participants had developed a cooperation project within a year.

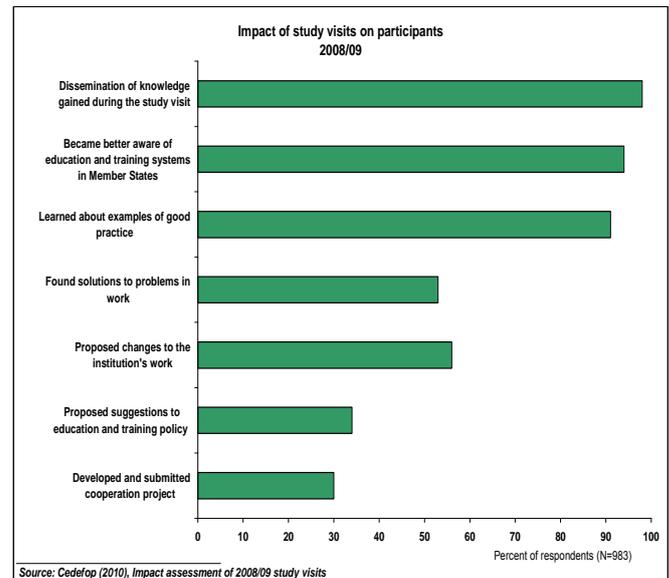
<sup>(4)</sup> [http://studyvisits.cedefop.europa.eu/index.asp?cid=3&artid=7456&scid=77&artlang=EN&per\\_id=2549](http://studyvisits.cedefop.europa.eu/index.asp?cid=3&artid=7456&scid=77&artlang=EN&per_id=2549)

<sup>(5)</sup> [http://studyvisits.cedefop.europa.eu/index.asp?cid=3&artid=8097&scid=77&artlang=EN&per\\_id=2515](http://studyvisits.cedefop.europa.eu/index.asp?cid=3&artid=8097&scid=77&artlang=EN&per_id=2515)

<sup>(6)</sup> <http://www.cedefop.europa.eu/EN/publications/16385.aspx>

<sup>(7)</sup> <http://studyvisits.cedefop.europa.eu/index.asp?cid=3&artid=8051&scid=77&artlang=EN>

Figure 3: Study visits impact (participants 2008/09)



Some 98% of study visit participants shared their learning with their colleagues, managers, other experts, students and parents. Many proposed changes to their institution's work and to education and training policy. For some participants, study visits changed their professional activities and improved their personal skills.

For organisers study visits are also rewarding. Host organisations have an opportunity to present their work and achievements. Awareness of European issues is also raised among the local community.

Overall, study visits have shown to be an effective way of learning.