

SUMMARY OF KNOWLEDGE SHARING IN SMALL GROUPS

BEFORE THE VISIT

Read the [Handbook for organisers of the study visits](#) and have a look at [Participant's Companion](#).

Prepare, prepare and prepare!

Always have a Plan B! Be ready for the unexpected! Think about it and don't worry! The better the pre-planning, the less need for Plan B.

Read also [Graham Parkin's](#) advice.

Cedefop suggests:

The Handbook and the Participant's Companion have been updated to reflect latest education and training policies and developments at European level. Reading Annex 1 will help you put the content of your visit into the context.

Create a team!

Organising a study visit needs a team to bring ideas together, brainstorm, do the work and organisation of the visit, etc. Try to make a core team, delegate work. Having more people in the core team enables the sharing of work, but the team cannot be too large. Every member in the core team can make a group to organise an event in the programme and take responsibility, for example, a social evening. BUT the coordinator must know everything and have strings in her/his hands in order to avoid overlapping meetings, special requirements, timing etc.

Participants:

- Take interest in them and get to know them well.
- Use [Olive](#) (names, work, motivation, special needs).
- Contact your participants as soon as possible.

Communication with participants:

- Communicate a lot beforehand.
- ASK questions - food, religion, medicine.
- Make your mobile phone number available and TALK.

Cedefop suggests:

You can learn about your participants' motivation, special needs, and interests from the information already available in Olive for you.

Read [A Quick guide](#) on accessing data.

- Inform participants in advance about:
 - the need to have insurance;
 - about weather forecast;
 - not to bring their family members or partners along.
- If you feel like, use Facebook.

Participants' presentations:

- Usually the programme underestimates the time it takes for participants' presentations, keep this in mind!
- Inform about expectations: length, format, focus.
- Send a template.
- Collect in advance; circulate in advance.
- See if you would like to use Google docs, blogs, Facebook to share.
- Give a timeslot for each participant on the agenda; it gives buy-in and ownership to participants on the time.
- Spread presentations over a few days (not all on the same day) BUT not till the last day.
- Read [Ivanna D'Arcy's](#) advice.

Participants say:

To make presentations of every country's school system takes to much time. To have an overall view you just have to search the Internet where the [information is accessible in English](#). What would be more interesting is to hear about what each country does in context of the theme of the visit.

Provide a template and a time limit for each delegate's presentation.

Programme:

Participants say:

It's important that the description in the catalogue and the practice of the visit correspond. More focus on the theme of the study visit, organisers tend to diverge from the subject; creating a feeling that they wanted to share everything they have rather than focus directly on the topic.

There should be enough time to exchange experiences between teachers and visitors after the visit in the classes.

- Identify and contact schools/institutions to be visited and find proper speakers.
- Inform all involved, coordinate effort (speakers, host institutions, local authorities).
- Ensure the coherence of speakers: talk to speakers in advance, send full agenda, speakers should speak on their relevant work without overlapping. Select preparatory questions for each speaker.
- Meet the involved people in person; visit the schools, discuss with principals and teachers. Provide information, draft agenda, participants' backgrounds.
- Find the best existing examples of practice on the topic of the study visit to show BUT be careful not to overload the programme: 1 school visit or 1-2 speakers per day is enough.

- **Plan time for discussion and free time!**
- You can offer cultural activities (not at the expense of the programme and on voluntary basis): offer a short language course, interactive dance workshop, a farewell evening.
- Read [Reihnard Attard's](#), [Robert Roks'](#) and [Paul Schram's](#) advice.

Participants say:

The participants felt that there were plenty of opportunities to informally discuss the issues at hand but that we would have benefited from more formal opportunities to work together.

Language skills:

- Be ready that not all participants in the group will speak fluent English/French/German/Spanish.

Costs:

- Consult [the national agency of your country](#) as regards any financial provisions for the organisers.
- Keep a balance sheet;
- Bear in mind the costs of living and per diem of the participants - check [financial provisions](#);
- Try to reduce expenses - no need to provide lunch every day. Participants' grant is meant to cover their subsistence during the visit.
- Local city hall can assist with money, stationary, holding a reception.

Inform local press and media

- Read [Silvio Della Corte's](#) advice.

Cedefop suggests:

Consult a paper on [adding value to a study visit through communication](#) prepared for you by Cedefop

Last but not least:

- Do not book accommodation in your name!
- Identify a closest emergency health service.

DURING THE VISIT

Have an informal **ice-breaking** meeting on the evening before the start of the visit.

Make an **expectations check** (people organise and participate in study visits for various reasons that sometimes conflict).

Start the week with '**common ground**' setting in an active and participatory way by:

- explaining the programme;
 - agreeing on the rules of the games (for example, respect for time);
 - getting terminology clarified.
- Read [Roger Crane's](#) advice.

Cedefop suggests:

On our website you can find links to [resources that you could use that contain terminology](#) about education and training in Europe.

You can also use descriptions of national systems of education and training prepared by [Cedefop](#) and [Eurydice](#).

Accompany the group during the entire week. Try to be there for your guests, from the beginning (receiving them on the first day) to the very end of the study visit. One obvious contact person to appeal to gives a secure feeling.

Have an open positive social attitude.

Stick to the programme BUT keep it open and **flexible**.

Group dynamics:

Participants say:

Start every morning with half an hour discussion and reflection of what happened the day before so that the report may be started on at an earlier stage.

- It is key to success of the visit.
- Stimulate discussion: put questions; provoke the participants.
- Consider splitting up the group for some activities (group report writing, visits, daily reflections) BUT do not forget to bring them back for most of the activities.

- Always give **time for discussion!**
- Give time for reflection.
- Read [Lucie Cizkova's](#) advice.

Participants say:

... we would like to have more free time, maybe in the afternoon for doing 'homework', i.e., reading documents the organisation has given us.

Preparing a group report:

- Invite the participants to try and find someone who speaks the working language of the visit or for whom it is a mother tongue to summarise finding and edit the final group report - group reporter.
- Always allocate time for reporting within the visit timetable.
- Have a flipchart where you keep track of questions to be answered later or individually ('parking lot of questions')
- You may invite 2 participants each day to report on the day's activities. In this way, you will get the entire group actively involved in the visit and keep discussion throughout the day. It will also help those with weaker language skills to participate and feel more comfortable.

- Read [Silvio Della Corte's](#) advice.

Ensure a place for participants' common activities and work

- information point,
- laptop and internet/print possibility,
- room for preparing group report and for group discussion.

Involve students (and/or even parents):

It is important that the participants interact with the pupils/students too (although it is not always easy, but try it!). The organisers can use primary school students, secondary school students, high school students, and university students as guides, “sheep dogs”, introducing and presenting their school. University/teacher training students can take participants to and from the hotel, teach dances, answer questions about students' life and studies, present their study portfolios, tell about their experiences, etc. and it is beneficiary to both parties.

Participants say:

There is very little we would change apart from (perhaps) one or two less visits, just to enable us to have more time for questions and more time to talk to the most important people - the young people.

It would be nice to see more of the children at work and have more interaction with the pupils.

Participants say:

It was very important to get the students' perspective- one of the strengths of this visit was the level of students' participation in the visit, demonstrated by the number of presentations and their willingness to talk to us and share views.

Participants can also make a short presentation to pupils - even small ones - and to students: students enjoy and benefit from meeting and talking to educational specialists and maybe get motivated finding something for themselves in their future!

Read [Eija Liisa Sokka-Meaney's](#) advice.

Costs:

- If you warned participants in advance, you can collect cash on arrival for meals and local transportation. Some organisers do it for convenience, but it is not mandatory as participants can pay for themselves, they just need to be informed how and how much. Always give a receipt or a detailed account of the spending.
- Please note: **participants cannot be asked to pay for any content** of the study visit (for example, guest speakers, management fees).

Learning of the organisers:

- Organisers also want to learn from participants about examples of good practice.
- Allow participants interact with hosts, students.

Network and future cooperation:

- At the start of the visit, invite the participants to start thinking about possible cooperation during the visit.
- A good presentation of yourself (your institution, the topic of the visit) is a key to make long-term relationships/connections/future projects.
- It is important to give the participants and members of the hosting institution to meet and exchange ideas in non-formal situations.

Participants say:

We felt it was a pity that the expertise we brought to the visit as a group was not exploited to the maximum by our hosts. This could have been used to create new networks or to cultivate new partnerships for future projects. It was apparent that the participants set out with this aim. We would have liked more interaction with our hosts.

Language skills:

Participants say:

Avoid activities that are in the native language only, as the benefits to the observer are minimal.

- Always use the working language of the visit.
- Use a combination of politeness and helpfulness but respect for the majority of the group
- Respect differences (of all kinds)!

AFTER THE VISIT

Keep in contact with the participants: you might receive some useful information afterwards.

Provide feedback to visited schools and institutions. Issue a certificate of acknowledgement to the places visited and guest speakers.

Disseminate the result and experience of the visit.

Participants say:

Our group has started a [Facebook page](#) in order to facilitate the building of future networks and future coordinated actions, as well as information sharing.

Benefits from the study visits: we all (organisers, participants, visited schools and guests, local community) benefit!