



Knowledge-sharing seminar for study visits organisers

Thessaloniki, 14-15 September 2009

Outcomes

Background

The knowledge-sharing seminar organised by Cedefop on 14 and 15 September in Thessaloniki, aimed to inform better organisers of study visits on recent policy developments in Europe and provide them with guidance on how to organise good quality study visits. The focus of the seminar was on two themes largely represented in study visits in the academic year 2009/10:

- innovation and creativity in education and training, looking at creative ways of teaching and learning;
- education and training for employability looking more specifically at cooperation between education and training institutions with partners in the labour market.

Fifty-nine study visits organisers shared their experiences with their peers and with 28 representatives of national agencies as well as with national and European experts on the selected themes.

Cedefop organised the seminar to reinforce the quality of the study visits programme. The seminar programme was created to support organisers of study visits to prepare an interesting and stimulating study visit on the selected themes.

The seminar

The speakers presented the main trends and developments at European level related to innovation, creativity, entrepreneurship in education and training and its cooperation with the business world. They also explained how the study visits programme is linked to the latest policy developments such as the strategic framework for cooperation in education and training - the Education and training 2020 work programme - and how it addresses the global challenges posed by the current economic crisis.

The seminar contained practical advice on how to prepare study visits relevant to the selected theme, corresponding to the catalogue description and to participants' expectations. Reference was made to the tools and guidelines that organisers have at their disposal such as the handbook for organisers, the management information system and Cedefop's online sources, publications and networks to prepare and run a successful study visit.

To stimulate debate between participants, the seminar included formal presentations, discussions, presentations of good examples of practice, exhibition of creative products/materials from schools, knowledge-sharing workshops, feedback and recommendation sessions. Seminar participants were split into three workshops where discussions were held on:

(a) Ways to promote innovation and creativity in education and training

It was made clear during the workshop that Europe needs to strengthen its capacity for innovation and creativity to respond effectively to developing a knowledge society. People need to obtain the right balance of generic key competences and transversal creative skills to help them constantly learn and adapt to any technological or economic changes.

The workshop presented good examples of how the curriculum may become oriented to key competences and learning outcomes and flexible encouraging active and experiential learning and trying different methods and approaches based on individual learners needs. Fostering the creative potential of students is thought to be a prerequisite for successful delivery of curricula, developed transversally through the core subjects, and not as a separate module. Several examples were provided on how students' creative skills can be developed in education and vocational training settings: inviting artists, entrepreneurs and professionals for activities in schools, encourage 'learning by doing' and project-based activities, empowering students to develop their own learning spaces, considering the local specific environment in school curricula, turning teachers and trainers into learning guides and facilitators rather than transmitters of knowledge.

Such changes are considered necessary to allow education and training systems to cope with the changing needs of society and the labour market. There is still a long way to go before all European systems of education and training change their mindset towards such innovative and creative approaches in teaching and learning. Workshop participants discussed some of the obstacles such as teachers' lack of continuous professional development, some institutional and administrative constraints as well as the perception that creative approaches are too 'soft' to the detriment of focusing on basic competences.

(b) Promoting cooperation between education and training institutions and partners in the labour market

It was made clear that education, training and employability are strongly linked and that solutions to the changing needs of the labour market can be based on partnerships and cooperation between education and training institutions, society and the world of work.

The workshop presented good examples of how development of learners' entrepreneurial potential as well as the opening up of education and training systems to society, industry and more specifically employers and enterprises contributes to increasing employability. Some examples include: cooperation and dialogue of social partners in education and training policy, development and implementation, professional development of teachers and trainers; entrepreneurial skills embedded in the curriculum and a strong commitment of policy-makers at national, regional and local levels.

Discussions revealed mainly two barriers to developing cooperation between education and training institutions and partners in the labour market: (i) lack of appropriate funding to establish a sustainable partnership and cooperation; and (ii) lack of industry trained/experienced teachers and trainers.

(c) Adding value to a study visit through communication

The workshop was mostly an information/training session on why and how to promote the study visits programme and make it known to the education and training community as well as the wider public, using the media, mainly at local and regional levels. Media coverage is important as it provides recognition of the programme and of those who contribute to it such as organisers, participants and hosts of visits. It adds value to the programme by showing the benefits of participating in a study visit and by outlining the main achievements on how it contributes to development of lifelong learning policies and practices at local and regional levels. It also demonstrates to the wider public the return on the investment provided by the EU.

As education and training are topics that interest the media, the workshop provided participants with practical advice and tips on how to work with local media:

- differences between the types of media;
- providing them with 'home town stories' that help local newspapers to sell;
- elements of a simple news release;
- dealing with interviews;
- identifying local media contacts and cultivating these contacts.