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Education and Culture DG
Lifelong Learning Programme

How can social partners participate more actively in study visits?

Reports from working groups

Working group 1/ Working group 2

Chairs: Mr Hans-Detlev Küller, Confederation of German Trade Unions/Mr George Kostakis and Mr Loukas Zahilas, Cedefop

Rapporteurs: Ms Mattie Allam, ECOTEC, United Kingdom/Ms Lorraine McDyer, LEARGAS, Ireland

Points to be discussed:

→ **Ways to increase the involvement of social partners in the programme**

✓ *How can the active participation in the programme be increased?*

Lack of competence in the working language of the Study Visit is often a barrier to participation for a number of candidates. It is important that candidates feel confident enough with their language skills. It is often the case that candidates have a good command of the working language of the Study Visit but lack the confidence to participate.

While National Agencies should ensure that approved candidates have sufficient competence in the working language to participate in the Visit it is also important not to impose unnecessary restrictions in this regard.

The application deadline in many cases is too early. It is difficult for applicants to plan one year ahead. Perhaps having a second deadline would be useful and it would also help to soak up funds from cancelled applicants.

The application period is too short i.e. the time between when the Catalogue is produced and the application deadline is very tight – only 2 months.

Links between National Agencies need to be strengthened. National Agencies could hold information sessions and invite representatives from social partners to attend the meetings. Inviting previous Study Visit participants to present their experiences at the meetings would also be useful. More targeted promotion in the form direct communication to social partner representatives is necessary.



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Cedefop should continue to inform the European Umbrella organisations of Trade Unions about the Study Visit Programme and

encourage them to disseminate this information at a national level and encourage them to make links with the National Agencies.

There is a need for National Agencies to clarify the differences between the Lifelong Learning Sectoral Programmes so that candidates are clear in terms of activities that they are eligible to participate in.

- ✓ *What themes are of interest to social partners? How can the social partners propose a theme? How can the social partners influence the offered themes? How can the social partners propose/host a visit?*

Social partners expressed strong interest in being involved in the selection of themes for Study Visits. Social Partners also indicated that the themes selected should be more related to current issues at European and national levels.

The process for selection of Study Visit themes was explained by Cedefop representatives to the workshop participants. It was clarified that there are essentially two ways of influencing the themes selected:

- Social Partners are represented on the Lifelong Learning Programme Committee and it may be an option to try an influence the selection of themes at this level.
- Social Partners could contact the National Agencies directly and propose themes.

It was agreed that the better and most feasible solution is to contact National Agencies directly regarding the selection of themes for Study Visits.

Cedefop representatives explained that the current themes are linked to the Education and Training 2010 objectives but that they will be reviewed this year. A working group will be established to discuss themes for the consolidated programme of Study Visits. Social Partner organisations will be represented on this working group. At present the themes are more suited to the general education sector but this will be addressed during the review of themes.

Social Partner representatives expressed an interest in the following themes:

- Recognition of informal learning
- Active citizenship



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- Equal opportunities
- Access to the labour market
- The establishment of National Qualifications Frameworks

Consideration should also be given to developing themes that focus on specific sectors such as transport, the food sector, agriculture etc.

✓ *What do NAs expect from social partners?*

National Agencies expect that Social Partners will also act as disseminators and multipliers for the Study Visits Programme. National Agencies need to clarify with Social Partner representatives on Advisory Boards or other Committees that they also have a role in this regard.

National Agencies could consider having representatives from Social Partner organisations as members of Evaluation Committees/Selection Boards. It was suggested that the Commission should provide National Agencies with guidelines to recommending to them that Social Partners should be represented on National Selection/Evaluation Committees.

Social Partners should also support their employees/staff to participate in Study Visits. Managers should recognise the importance of staff participating in Study

Visits and allow them the time off work to participate in Visits. They should also allow staff some time to disseminate their learning and experiences with other colleagues on their return.

✓ *How can NAs/organisers involve the social partners more in study visits?*

National Agencies have different ways of organising Study Visits. Some Agencies have a Call for Organisers while some Agencies organise visits themselves. This often depends on the human and financial resources available to National Agencies.

Social Partners can be involved in Study Visits in a several ways:

- Social Partners can be active participants in Study Visits
- Social Partners can help to promote the Programme and act as disseminators/multipliers
- Social partners organisations can be involved as hosts during Study Visits



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There was general agreement that Study Visit organisers should not just showcase best practice during Study Visits. Participants should also be exposed to real practice.

National Agencies indicated that they often have difficulty in identifying Social Partners who could give an input during a Study Visit. Social Partners should provide National Agencies with a list of regional and national Social Partner organisations that may be called on to contribute to or facilitate a Study Visit

→ **Promotion of study visits within the social partners members in your country and at EU level**

✓ *Which are the benefits of the participation for social partners?*

Cedefop should develop a flyer targeted at managers to convince them that participation in Study Visits is of benefit to employees, other colleagues and the wider organisation.

The benefits of participation in Study Visits are as follows (not an exhaustive list):

- participants develop intercultural competencies;
- it facilitates networking;
- it provides participants with potential partners for future projects;
- participants broaden their knowledge of specific themes which helps to strengthen social dialogue at a national level;
- getting to know other systems is of enormous benefit to participants.

Participation also provides an added value for the organisation of the participant. The participant should share the discussion points and learning outcomes from the Study Visit with their the organisation.

The dissemination of the Study Visits outcome by participants can link into the promotion of the programme (see outline below).

✓ *What can the social partners organisations do?*

Social partners can allow previous Study Visit participants and National Agencies to present their experiences at national congress. Social Partner organisations can help to dissemination results and organise information sessions where they can invite National



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Agencies and previous participants to present information and experiences.

Social Partners participants can submit articles to Newsletters or magazines about their experiences of participation in a Study Visit.

These articles can also be uploaded to their websites. This provides participants to reflect and discuss the topic of the Study Visit on a broader platform in their home country and at the same time encourages colleagues to take part in the programme, too.

New events at National level can also be initiated in co-operation with National Agencies. Information days that target especially at Social Partners.

Social Partners can also use their networks and memberships in European umbrella organisations to raise the awareness of Study Visits and the opportunity of members to apply to take part in the programme.

The working group expressed the idea to create a module on a particular part of a Study Visit on the programme websites to showcase good-practice during a Study Visit. This module can be a film or description of a qualification in Bulgaria for instance and is intended to transfer the knowledge of what participants learn on a Study Visit.

- ✓ *How can social partners support their members who participate in a study visit (by preparation and dissemination activities)?*

Social Partners can provide or support language training for potential participants.

Social Partners can support employees and encourage them to participate in Study Visits. They should allow them time off work to do so. They should also allow them some time after the Visit to disseminate their learning.

Social Partners can prepare presentations for their participants that they can take on their Study Visit. Delegates on a visit are required to hold a presentation or talk about their National VET and/or education system.