



STUDYVISITS

for vocational
education and training
experts in 2007

Transition to a wider perspective



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The European **Center for the Development of Vocational Training** (Cedefop) is the European Union's reference centre for vocational education and training. We provide information on and analyses of vocational education and training systems, policies, research and practice. Cedefop was established in 1975 by Council Regulation (EEC) No 337/75.

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Study visits for vocational education and training experts in 2007

Transition to a wider perspective

Cedefop has coordinated the study visits programme for vocational education and training (VET) experts for 23 years. Over these years the programme has been an effective vehicle for discussion and common learning among European VET policy-makers and specialists and a success story for Cedefop. The value of the programme was confirmed by the external evaluation of Cedefop that took place last year. Although numbers of participants of the former programme were relatively small, the effects of the study visits on individuals, mobility, knowledge and networking possibilities were judged significant.

Foreword

Recognising Cedefop's successful stewardship of study visits for vocational training, particularly the quality of the programme and its methods of evaluating and disseminating results, the European Commission invited the Centre to coordinate a new consolidated programme of study visits from 2008 to 2013, from 1 January 2008.

With the inception of the lifelong learning programme, study visits will bring together a wider spectrum of education and training policy-makers, specialists, social partners, and thus create stronger links between all levels of education and training systems.

Cedefop is dedicated to continue study visits as an important vehicle for policy cooperation and common learning. The themes will be aligned to the priorities of the education and training 2010 work programme as well as the priorities of the lifelong learning programme. We see our challenge as maintaining a stable presence of VET in the programme and ensuring proportionate participation of various target groups, especially policy-makers and social partners.

We hope this small publication will raise awareness and interest in the programme among those involved in shaping vocational education and training policies, providing vocational training and among the social partners, especially considering the new architecture of the programme.

Aviana Bulgarelli
Director of Cedefop

Introduction For the study visits programme, 2007 was a year of transition due to the merging of the former ARION study visits, for general education specialists, with study visits for vocational education and training (VET) specialists that Cedefop managed for over 20 years.

From 1 January 2008, Cedefop coordinates the consolidated study visits, one of the key actions of the lifelong learning programme 2007-13 (LLP) adopted by the European Parliament and the Council on 5 November 2006 (Decision 1720/2006/EC, OJ L 327, 24.11.2006).

Study visits support policy development and cooperation at European level in lifelong learning, notably the Lisbon process and the education and training 2010 work programme, as well as the Bologna and Copenhagen processes and their successors.

To meet the above challenge successfully, the Cedefop study visits team focused on implementing and closing Cedefop's study visits for VET experts in 2007 and, in parallel, on preparing the transition towards coordinating consolidated study visits.

Table 1.
Key data on study visits 2005-07

	2005	2006	2007
Number of study visits	66	68	59
Number of participants	760	842	764
Countries:			
• hosting visits	26	29	26
• sending participants	32	30	30
Number of themes covered	13	12	11

Key data In 2007, 59 study visits took place in 26 countries, providing a forum for discussion and common learning for some 764 vocational education and training stakeholders from varied backgrounds (including social partners, public authorities, human resource management, chambers of commerce, vocational training institutions and providers) from 30 countries. From candidate countries, 19 participants took part in study visits (18 from Turkey and 1 from Croatia) (see Tables 1 and 2).

Country	Number of participants sent	Number of participants received	Number of organised visits
Austria	19	21	2
Belgium	28	26	2
Bulgaria	7	12	1
Cyprus	8	11	1
Czech Republic	16	0	0
Denmark	19	15 (27) *	1 (2)
Estonia	12	15	1
Finland	19	28	2
France	63	37	3
Germany	79	58	5
Greece	30	23	2
Hungary	20	12	1
Ireland	23	42	3
Italy	70	56	4
Latvia	12	12	1
Lithuania	14	12	1
Luxembourg	6	14	1
Malta	4	15	1
Netherlands	30	41	3
Poland	40	0	0
Portugal	33	29	2
Romania	2	0	0
Slovenia	13	26	2
Slovakia	0	0	0
Spain	51	48	4
Sweden	27	58 (70) *	4 (5)
United Kingdom	68	75	6
Croatia	1	0	0
Turkey	18	15	1
Iceland	8	15	1
Liechtenstein	0	0	0
Norway	24	36	3
	764	764	59

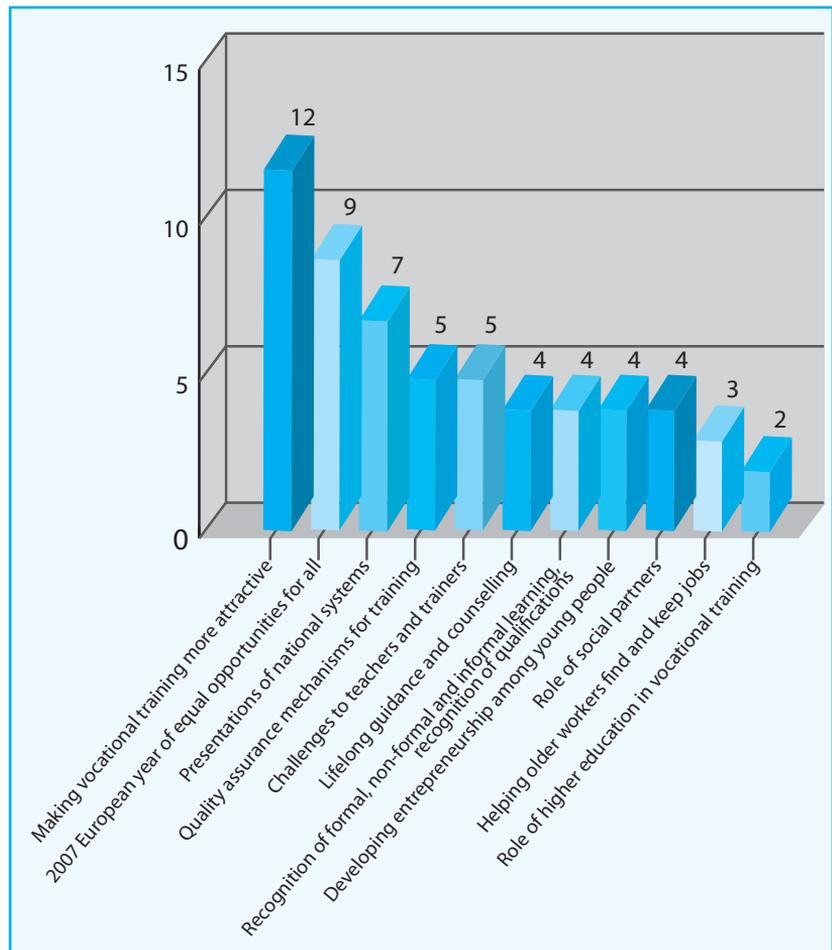
Table 2.
Key data on study visits 2007, by country

*The numbers in parentheses include a study visit organised jointly by Denmark and Sweden.

In 2007, a slight decrease was observed in the number of visits organised and number of participants sent, especially compared to 2006. This was because some countries had to rearrange national structures for managing the new programme and as a result, offered fewer visits. As to the number of participants, in 2006 Cedefop was able to run several special calls for applications that were normally targeted at very specific groups of VET specialists to attract participants to study visits on specific economic sectors; this was not the case in 2007.

In 2007, study visits covered 11 framework themes, nine visits focused on vocational training in specific economic sectors (agri-food, health and social work, tourism, retail trade and printing and media) (see Figure 1).

Figure 1:
Number of study visits, by theme



As usual, participants represented various organisations and institutions related to or involved in vocational education and training. The largest group (33 %) represented public bodies involved in providing VET. Representatives of trade unions and employers' organisations and private enterprises comprised 6 % for each group. Compared to previous years, there was a slight increase in the number of participants representing VET institutions, chambers of commerce, crafts and industries and non-school vocational training to 7 %, 3 % and 4 % respectively (from 5 %, 2 % and 2 % in 2006) (see Figure 2).

Most participants were highly satisfied with their participation in a study visit (see Figure 3).

Participants

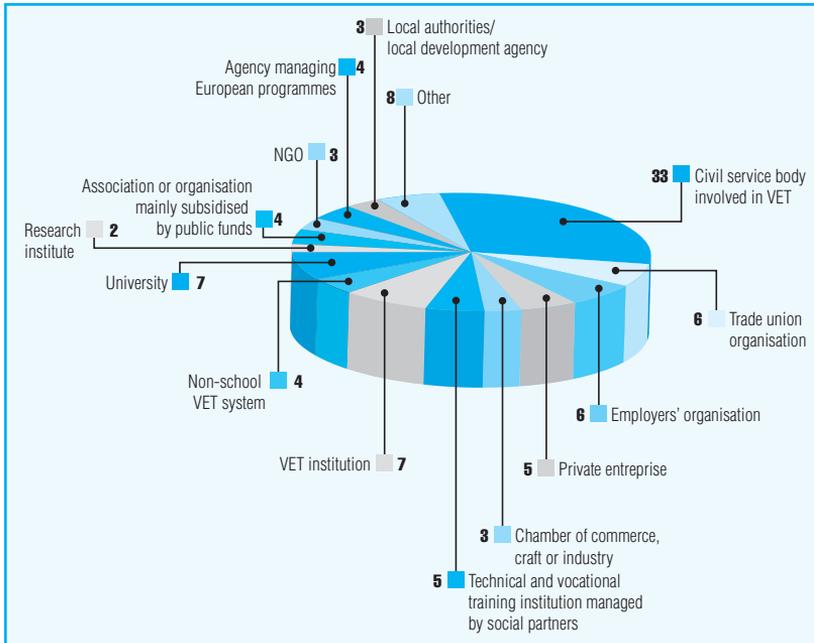


Figure 2:
Distribution of participants by category of employment, percent

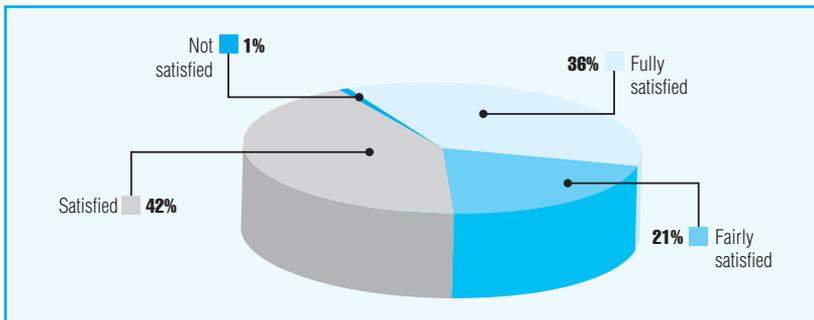


Figure 3:
Participants' satisfaction (based on group reports, N=764)

Social partners in the study visits programme

Participation in study visits is a good opportunity for social partners' representatives to exchange information and experience on their roles and involvement in vocational education and training policies and systems in their countries with colleagues and other VET experts from all over Europe. Cedefop's study visits team pays special attention to ensuring proportionate participation of social partners in the programme.

In 2007, 256 (or 34 %) of 764 participants represented trade unions, employers' organisations, private enterprises, chambers of commerce, industry or craft, and technical or vocational training establishments managed by the social partners. The social partners were more interested in study visits that dealt with training people in the labour market (adults, older workers), vocational training in specific economic sectors, developing entrepreneurship and making vocational training more attractive.

Greece, Iceland and the UK organised study visits focused on the role of the social partners in vocational education and training, while other organisers included visits to social partners' organisations in their programmes or invited social partners to present their perspectives during discussions.

Participants of the study visit in Iceland (*Active cooperation between education and industry, Reykjavik, 10 to 12 October 2007*) considered Iceland 'a forerunner because of the involvement of trade unions in education and the use of levies for a training fund'. They pointed out that 'lifelong learning is an embedded part of living and working in Iceland and they make good use of blended learning, including e-learning and distance learning. Iceland has a creative approach to financing lifelong learning'.

The group in Denmark (*Situated learning for strengthening competences and employability, Aalborg, 24 to 28 September 2007*) was impressed with the involvement of the social partners and the cooperation between schools, employers and the government. They highlighted voluntary local education committees, in which trade union and employer representatives contribute to the assessment of new firms that wanted to offer work placements.

Participants' learning and impressions

Exchanging ideas and experience between participants and host institutions during visits improves understanding of other education and training systems and can generate ideas that may be useful back home. Participants also establish new contacts that can be used for developing new projects, or creating networks, or both. The organisers

and hosts provide excellent support for their visitors and create a friendly and cooperative atmosphere in the groups.

Study visits are visits of three to five days bringing together a group of 10 to 15 specialists and policy-makers from several European countries to examine a specific theme of common interest in a VET field. A study visit usually includes presentations and on-site visits to places such as educational and training institutions, ministries, company training centres, guidance centres and universities. Participants are not only presented with the ways the host country deals with the theme but also share the approaches used in their own countries. While preparing group reports they analyse and summarise their views, which provide interesting insights into the theme of the study visit and examples of good practice.

Below are some observations from group reports on selected themes.

Making vocational training more attractive was a theme discussed from two angles, creating vocational pathways for young people and developing strategies aimed at increasing adult participation in vocational training to ensure up-to-date qualifications and successful integration into the labour market.

Attractiveness of vocational training

During the visit in Portugal (*Partnerships between initial VET and the labour market, Lisbon, 15 to 19 October 2007*), participants discussed and found significant several strategies for attracting young people to vocational training, among which proper involvement of the social partners in supporting lifelong learning; strengthening the links between vocational education and training and local companies and employers, including establishing the content of relevant curricula; balanced cooperation of public and private training institutions to offer the best available training and support to young people. They identified a need for strategies to prevent young people from withdrawing from training programmes without qualification and gaining appropriate employment or to provide opportunities for them to resume training.

Participants of this visit found it very beneficial to visit a vocational institution, *Instituto do Emprego e formação profissional*, and a recognition centre for the unemployed, *Centro de Formação Profissional*, where they could 'see in practice the dual working of recognition of competences for basic education and attainment of a vocational qualification'.

Participants of the visit in Finland (*Regional cooperation in VET, Jyväskylä, 1 to 4 October 2007*) found that vocational education in Finland has become more attractive to students and their families because initial vocational education combines practical and academic learning.

In the Flemish system of education and training (*Vocational training: target for youngsters?!, Bruges, 5 to 8 November 2007*), participants identified the cooperation between schools, industry and non-profit organisations as very positive as it helps to supply schools with modern equipment and ensure work placements for students.

The Albeda College in the Netherlands (*Integrated approach to reduce early school leaving, Delft, 4 to 7 June 2007*) was evaluated by participants as a good example of a joint venture between a college and a private business. A restaurant on the college premises is run by a company that provides students with ‘real life experiences of working in a restaurant whilst learning at the same time [...]. The food was cooked to a very good standard and was enjoyed by all’.

Having a possibility to talk to some mature learners in Ireland (*Encouraging adults to take part in training, Dublin, 15 to 18 October 2007*), participants observed that adult learners face similar challenges in all European countries, such as combining professional and personal life or recognition and validation of informal learning were not always easy. ‘The only differences seemed to be in how advanced each of the countries were in tackling these issues and the extent to which employers and the State were involved’.

Folksuniversitetet in Sweden, an adult education centre for immigrants (*Lifelong guidance in the educational system, Gothenburg, 15 to 19 October 2007*), works with adult immigrants who have upper secondary school education or an academic degree from abroad, many of whom were refugees or war victims. The centre provides a 10-week course with teacher-controlled tuition and helps learners ‘reach a high level of Swedish for further education or qualified work in Sweden’. Students are supported both by teachers and career guidance officers.

The Vocational Training Institute for Adults in Isiodos, Greece (*Vocational training in the food sector in Greece, Larissa, 14 to 18 May 2007*), provides a 125-hour course aimed at increasing knowledge in economics and management and IT skills of low-skilled farmers. The course is taught predominantly in the evening to adapt to their busy schedules.

Participants of the visit to Bulgaria (*Vocational education and training in Bulgaria, Sofia, 14 to 17 May 2007*) found the experience of the Bulgarian German VET Training Centre in Pazardzik ‘an excellent example of development and improvement of adult VET [...]. The main aims are to improve quality, increase mobility in the workforce and reinforce the contacts between business and training centres. The centre gave a very modern impression with updated teaching equipment as well as qualified teachers. The use of ICT was extensive and some parts of the courses were delivered online. Internationally recognised content leads to certificates that can be used worldwide. [...] They had partners in 16 different countries’.

It has been a very popular theme in the last years and the reports have highlighted many interesting findings from countries who presented their policies and practices for developing entrepreneurship among young people as well as adults.

***Developing
entrepreneurship
among young people***

Nordland county in Norway (*Young entrepreneurs in an Arctic setting, Bodo, 19 to 23 March 2007*) traditionally receives visitors to share their experiences in educating young entrepreneurs in an Arctic setting. Participants observed real life examples of ‘how businesses and schools cooperated and how children were introduced to entrepreneurship at an early age’. The group was impressed with the ‘students’ companies and their products and how effectively they had applied theoretical knowledge to their enterprises. Primary school pupils impressed the group in particular in terms of their presentation, use of English and team spirit’.

In Malta (*Empowering young persons starting their business, Malta, 21 to 24 May 2007*), participants noted that entrepreneurship is taught and supported at all educational levels. ‘There is a coherent policy-driven process that clearly aims at reinforcing the concept of entrepreneurship, and which involves schools, colleges and university’. This process is focused on the structural reforms of the curricula and on setting up pilot projects from primary to tertiary level of education.

Some examples of good practice have been identified, such as the public employment service that ‘developed schemes to exit unemployment by setting up entrepreneurial activities in the public and private sectors’; the Malta Enterprise that ‘provides a range of advice, guidance and information’; the business incubator initiative that gives ‘new businesses a chance to develop and grow by providing premises, guidance and support [...] to develop a market for their products’.

Good potential for growth and transferability of the concept of a ‘centre for entrepreneurship’ was mentioned by participants of the visit to the Netherlands (*Entrepreneurship education creates enterprising young people, 's-Hertogenbosch, 12 to 15 November 2007*). In the participants’ view, this ‘strategy for future investment would create a spillover effect that would help expand the concept of the “centre for entrepreneurship” and encourage enterprises to engage in entrepreneurial educational partnerships. This would lead to more productive, better educated and culturally aware individuals that as a result would make better use of enterprises’ capital investments and encourage future [...] investment. The cooperation would also boost the rate of innovation that can be achieved by having better educated workers [capable of] generating new ideas. Such a facility in all Member States would assist with the development of entrepreneurship and encourage further linkage between European enterprise and educational bodies. Each centre could act as a European central hub helping to develop a national and European standardised platform of entrepreneurial education for all’.

**2007 – European year
of equal opportunities
for all**

The theme of social inclusion and creating equal educational opportunities for all has always been on the study visits agenda. The European year of equal opportunities for all, 2007, allowed participating countries to emphasise the importance of the theme in relation to meeting the needs of various groups that often have limited access to or few opportunities of upgrading their skills and successfully (re) entering the labour market.

Nine study visits organised by Germany, Ireland, Spain, France, Hungary, Slovenia and the UK examined provision of training opportunities for immigrants, students with learning difficulties, people with disabilities and their integration into the labour market.

Participants were very interested in the innovative legislation adopted in 2005 in France (*Promoting the professional integration of people with disabilities, Nantes, 18 to 22 June 2007*) on the rights and equal opportunities of people with disabilities that ‘includes openly also people with psychic disabilities (neuroses, psychoses, schizophrenia) parallel with physical, sensorial, mental and cognitive disabilities, as well as poly-handicaps and disabling, long-term illnesses. This legislation envisages large-scale integration of people with disabilities and aims to promote a real policy of accessibility to health care, accommodation, education, vocational training and employment’. Participants also discovered that ‘employers’ organisations are actively promoting possibilities to employ people with disabilities in mainstream business companies. Both the association of small and

medium-size companies and the association of big companies were running their own development and employers' awareness-raising projects'.

The integration approach based on strong links between the dual system and communities observed in Germany (Occupational participation as the key to integrating young migrants, Bonn/Köln, 15 to 18 October 2007) was regarded as a good practice. It is 'applied to working with employers, in some cases, employing project organisers with the same geographical and cultural background as many of the employers and individuals to be assisted'. This was very interesting for participants and they felt it 'worth further consideration of implementation elsewhere'.

Participants in the visit to Spain (*La mobilité géographique et le phénomène d'immigration en Espagne, Coruña, 7 to 11 May 2007*) described the Spanish view of social integration as 'a process of bilateral adjustment [...] and real value added for the country'. They noted a will to have a better understanding of immigrants as well as the recognised need for the Spanish 'to make an effort to adapt to the culture of immigrants, and vice versa'. The strategic plan for citizenship and integration 2007 to 2010 that involves all levels (local, regional and national) was regarded as an initiative worth studying.

Another visit hosted by Spain focused on promoting gender equality in training and on the labour market (*Initiatives promoting gender equality in companies, Madrid, 22 to 25 October 2007*). Participants highly appreciated the policies implemented in Spain to improve the situation of women on the labour market, specifically noting the work done by the Women's Institute, Instituto de la Mujer, and the Women's Foundation, Fundación Mujeres.

An interesting approach was demonstrated by the Malmö University of Sweden, which offers a degree in career guidance, and Cirius, an authority in the Danish Ministry of Science, Technology and Innovation, who organised a cross-border study visit on lifelong guidance and counselling (*Guidance in the border region of Oresund, Malmö and Copenhagen, 21 to 25 May 2007*). It proved a very good opportunity for participants to get acquainted with the latest developments of the two national systems of guidance for young people. The information on both systems allowed participants to compare ideas and good practices and take these new ideas back to their countries for further examination.

Lifelong guidance and counselling

In Denmark, participants noted that ‘Denmark’s reformed guidance system has created a more professional guidance service’ and ‘effective educational and vocational guidance was integral to the success of young people choosing pathways for their futures’. In fact, ‘the student is fully supported while at college, with training advisors and other representatives of the college approaching firms to help them get placements, counsellors and psychologists on hand to discuss any issues, and student coaches on hand to provide a more independent guiding hand. This latter group is new to the system, and seems to be an innovative approach to student counselling, with the aim of reducing the drop-out rate amongst students’.

The group was impressed by ‘the level of support offered to students in gaining a work placement, and there are a large number of people dedicated to doing just this’. They pointed out that ‘the level of support offered is higher than in any system in the group’s home countries – at any time it seems that each student can choose from up to seven different professional people to approach if they have a problem!’ Discussions revealed that the different countries were all working towards the same goal of a coherent, effective and integrated guidance system for young people but that they were all at different stages of the journey.

Impact of the study visits programme

Study visits provide an excellent opportunity for VET experts to meet other experts and specialists from other countries with different backgrounds to learn and discuss issues of common interest concerning education and training.

Cedefop pays special attention to following up with participants on the further development of their professional activities after a study visit. A questionnaire is sent to all participants within a year of their participation to examine the impact of the programme.

In 2007, the questionnaire was sent to 842 participants of 2006. Of these, 467 replied, which is the highest response rate for the last years of 55 %.

First, the results showed a high level of satisfaction with their participation in the programme: 71 % were very satisfied, 28 % satisfied and only eight participants expressed a certain degree of dissatisfaction.

Considering the results of the 2005 and 2006 questionnaires, it is possible to conclude that study visits have a positive long-term impact

on participants: they are very effective in providing new knowledge and innovative ideas for participants' activities (see Figure 4).

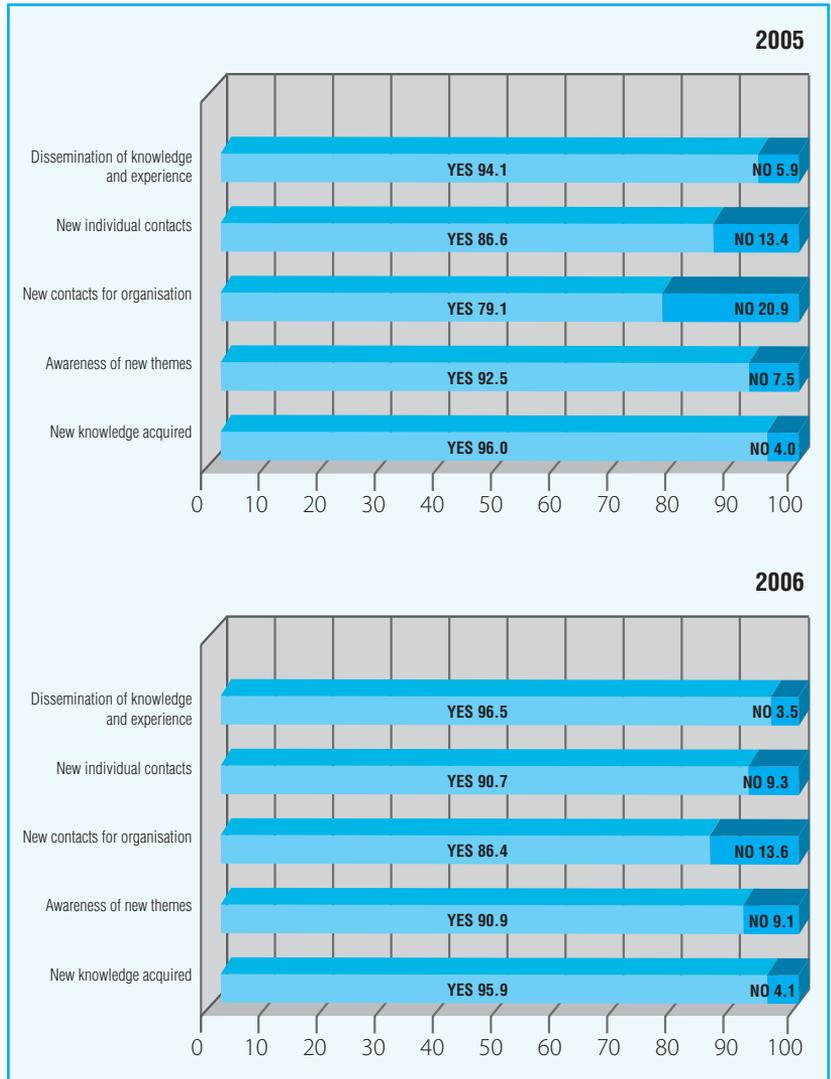
Analysis shows a consistent trend that study visits allow participants to acquire new knowledge on the theme of the visit and on VET systems of host countries (96 % responded positively both in 2005 and 2006). More than 90 % have become aware of new themes during their visits.

A vast majority of participants could establish new contacts for their organisations (79 % in 2005 and 86 % in 2006) and their own professional activity (86 % in 2005 and 91 % in 2006). However, more possibilities should be explored so contacts established among all participants and especially with host institutions are used to their full potential.

Although study visits seem to be more beneficial for individuals than for their organisations, most participants found study visits useful for acquiring new ideas to foster innovation not only in their own organisations but also in their own field of activities. Study visits stimulated transfer of innovative approaches to vocational and educational training. Participants' organisations most frequently used the new ideas they acquired to introduce or develop new ideas and/or reforms for VET systems, to introduce new methods and tools and to establish more international cooperation as well as to introduce new approaches to services, new ways of learning, wider training or service offer, new policies and new approaches to dealing with employers and unions.

Of participants in 2005 and 2006, 94 % and 97 % respectively shared the knowledge and experience they gained from the study visit with others who worked on related issues. Most frequently participants made a presentation, lecture or talk to management and colleagues. About half the participants have integrated the knowledge they gained into their work (56 % in 2005 and 57 % in 2006).

**Figure 4:
Impact of the study
visits programme
on participants,
summary of
responses,
2005 and 2006
questionnaires**



The transition in 2007 to a new consolidated programme has closed a separate programme of study visits for VET experts. Being part of a transversal programme brings new challenges and possibilities to the programme that will be coordinated by Cedefop. Now the programme will bring together representatives of a wider spectrum of education and training policy-makers, specialists, social partners, thus creating stronger links between all levels of education and training systems. Three types of study visits will be offered that will examine themes from:

Study visits – a way forward

- a general education perspective,
- a vocational education and training perspective,
- a comprehensive lifelong learning perspective.

The challenge for Cedefop will be to maintain a stable presence of VET in the programme, in terms of priorities, themes, number of study visits and to ensure proportionate participation of various target groups, especially policy-makers and social partners.

The study visits programme website provides useful information for the general public and also serves as an interactive online management and communication tool for study visit organisers and participants.

Study visits website

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

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The publication continues a series of annual reviews of implementation of the study visits programme and examines the results of 2007. Some data on the number of study visits, themes, host countries and the number and profiles of participants are presented. In 2007, 764 vocational education and training specialists and policy-makers as well as social partners benefited from participating in 59 study visits covering 11 themes. Some extracts from the reports are summarised by theme. The following themes are presented: *Making vocational training more attractive for young people and adult learners*, *Developing entrepreneurship and the European year of equal opportunities for all*. Analysis of the questionnaires of 2005 and 2006 provides insight into the impact of the study visits programme on participants' organisations and professional activities.



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