Consultancy for free? Evaluation practice and culture in the European Union and central and eastern Europe. Findings from selected EU programmes

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Abstract
Based on an understanding of evaluation as a development process, this study outlines the current debate on evaluation of vocational education and training (VET) in Europe. It defines and explains the criteria used for this exercise and applies them to a number of selected case studies from different EU programmes (NARIC network evaluation under Socrates, assessments of Phare VET programme case studies in Bulgaria, the Czech Republic and Slovakia and evaluation of Leonardo da Vinci I). Findings are then summarised with special emphasis on the instruments, tools, procedures and outputs used across different audiences and themes.
Programmes in central and eastern European countries (CEECs) where the authors have most experience, are used to analyse the evaluation capacities and procedures in place. The analysis considers the flaws and potential of the selected evaluation exercises and their impact on policies. Finally, a future research agenda and policy recommendations identify gaps in knowledge and the challenges for research in evaluating VET.
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The following definition of evaluation, as developed in the Leonardo da Vinci (LdV) twin projects CERN and EVAL (1), is used throughout this study: ‘Evaluation is to determine the significance or worth of something by careful appraisal and study. It is a developmental process that illuminates or enlightens the specific policies, processes and practice of its stakeholders and contributes to collective learning.’

Accordingly evaluation should aim at accountability (measuring stick) and improvement (torch) and cover project aims, objectives, outputs and impact. It applies criteria-referenced (e.g. defined project objectives), norm-referenced (e.g. against standards) and ipsitive-referenced (e.g. participant’s learning curve) description and judgement, internally and externally.

The evaluation cycle for projects and programmes follows a logical sequence (Figure 1). While theoretical understanding of evaluation is closely related to this cyclical improvement mechanism, it is clear that the timing, scope and dimensions of most evaluations do not allow the investigation of all aspects involved.

Figure 1: Evaluation cycle

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1. Introduction

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(1) The Capitalisation + Evaluation Research Network (CERN) and the E-VAL electronic environment were established under the Leonardo programme of the EU in 2001. They bring together experts in theory and practice of evaluation from 14 European countries. CERN analyses intention, effectiveness and impact of activity, in order to recommend future action and stimulate collective learning. E-VAL develops a virtual environment to support those involved in evaluation.
The importance of evaluation is increasingly recognised in EU policy-making and is mainly implemented via programmes and projects which, since 1994, have all undergone regular evaluation. Comparison between, capitalisation upon, evaluation of, valorisation from and knowledge development via these programmes and projects are thus key factors in the political and scientific debate in the EU relating to:

(a) demonstrating value for money in EU programmes;
(b) making better use of the experience, results and proposals emerging from the significant work undertaken.

Recent discussions about good governance also give evaluation research special policy relevance. The concept of valorisation entered EU language only recently but has occupied an important place in its agenda. It is now widely accepted in the community of practice of the Directorate General for Education and Culture. The concept is largely bureaucratic in nature: it was introduced and popularised by the European Commission for EU education and training programmes. Although its development included consultation with the expert community, it did not result from a scientific discourse, nor was it seriously validated against research into evaluation. It is defined as ‘the process of enhancing or optimising project outcomes through experimentation and exploitation with a view to increasing their value and impact’ (European Commission, 2002).

However often valorisation is understood as capitalisation on achievements or dissemination beyond the partnership. The concept itself involves monitoring, assessment, dissemination and mainstreaming as integral parts of valorisation, which are at the same time distinct tasks and activities. It is ambiguous: valorisation is often used as a synonym for evaluation or monitoring or dissemination or conversely as a separate activity from those mentioned. In short the term is unclear even where it is most used. To our knowledge it has not been taken up in European programmes of other Directorate Generals, where monitoring, evaluation, dissemination and mainstreaming of good practices are commonly recognised activities with clearly defined responsibilities. Being a confusing concept, it confused the implementation and accountability behind it. Indeed, are evaluations still necessary as the external and regular activity that provides feedback for further strategic decisions or are they a mere aspect of valorisation? Does valorisation have a formative or summative function? (2).

Many EU funded programmes and agencies (3) have developed substantial monitoring and evaluation procedures for education and training; so have other international organisations (World Bank, ILO, UNDP, Unesco, CoE, etc.). Evaluations are increasingly carried out at national and regional levels (often as a consequence of EU requirements). They differ in detail, but generally follow similar procedures and are realised mostly at the end of programme/project.

Rather than criticising specific evaluation exercises or presuming to judge ‘good practice’, this study tries to identify ‘relevant practice’ in evaluation activities and to present the crucial success factors for evaluation.

Moreover, we are interested in shedding light on the different evaluation cultures across Europe and pay particular attention to the intercultural dimension of evaluation exercises, which are often carried out by international or rather transnational cooperation.

Internationally funded programmes and projects are an important tool for policy innovation. While policy development may use various methods to verify relevance of innovative measures and solutions, pilot projects remain the most straightforward and efficient. Equally, without awareness and evaluation of projects and the foreseen impact on policies (often rendered via and fed into policies by an evaluation process), programmes and projects lead nowhere.

(2) In 2001, the European Commission established a group of international experts which involved representatives of LdV national agencies, social partners, promoters and national authorities to work on developing the valorisation strategy of LdV II and build on results of the first phase evaluation, undertaken by a group of external experts. The valorisation group was drafted by nomination from the European Commission. The group cooperated with various organisations such as qualification forum, Directorate General Employment. This, however, was often seen as a formal (sometimes even formalistic) consultation process to support arguments of the European Commission. Nevertheless, it contributed to the selection of the best projects and practices with their subsequent publication in the compendium and dissemination at ‘Employment week’ in 2001 (information from interviews).

(3) E.g. Socrates, Leonardo da Vinci, Phare, Adapt, Youth, fifth framework programme, EU agencies (Cedefop, ETF).
The following scheme addresses the link between projects/programmes and the policies that result from such projects.

We can hypothesise that the policy level benefits from the project implementation only under certain conditions, namely the indisputable interest in project implementation and in evaluation of its design, performance and results throughout the project lifespan. We attempt to verify this statement with the help of case studies of evaluations and assessments performed in different European and international programmes.

The case studies provided in Chapter 2 represent fairly diverse implementation approaches and evaluation methods and procedures. The analysis of the case studies has been performed by means of a commonly identified set of criteria (Annex 1). The main findings stem from the application of each of these research criteria to the case studies and their aggregation into general conclusions (Chapter 3). It is followed by identifying research gaps and recommendations for the European research agenda, policy and practice, in particular for the design of evaluation exercises.

Figure 2: **Link between projects, programmes and policies**
2. Case studies

Evaluations differ across programmes and countries. Each country has its specific cultural and historical context and we therefore select a range that enables conclusions to be reached. We look at how evaluation modes and cycles differ across various European programmes and in the specific national context and this enables us to identify any strengths and weaknesses of individual procedures.

Evaluation is not separated from policy development and implementation. While an important step in itself, it is only one phase of a larger process. We look therefore at the context, aspects of the legal and political framework, the specific role of the evaluation, eventual links to previous or later stages of the evaluation and the programme itself and finally effects of evaluations.

The evaluation culture evolves with the development of the democratic process and increased accountability for public spending. Evidence of evaluation culture is not apparent among many EU Member States. However the European Commission, by requiring the evaluation of the outcomes and impact of EU funds allocation, has played a role in fostering evaluation activities. CEECs have gained access to several EU-sponsored programmes, which have also undergone various evaluation and assessments.

Under the previous regime, CEECs were not familiar with evaluation in concept or practice. The only stakeholder was the state/party which did not expect any constructive and objective feedback on public action.

We shall now look at our selected cases of programme evaluations as reference points for further analysis. Although we focus on the evaluation documents, we shall refer to other relevant documents and the context of the case study. For each case study agreed common criteria were used to analyse the evaluation reports, the context of the EU programmes under consideration, and their impact (Annex 1). The annexes provide in depth analyses of the first four cases according to these criteria. It should be noted, however, that these criteria do not allow for objective and precise comparison across countries and programmes. Therefore, we used them rather as a guiding tool for analysis, looking also at additional information and documents whenever necessary.

2.1. Case studies on evaluation of Phare VET programmes in CEECs

Our first set of case studies of evaluating European Community support programmes is the Phare VET reform programme implemented in parallel in 10 CEECs between 1993 and 1998.

Normally, internationally funded programmes, in addition to covering the absence of a fund at the national level, are expected to bring an added value in terms of transnationality. Phare programme are somewhat unusual in that they are mostly designed and implemented at national level. They have been an EU assistance programme to CEECs in their transition to the market economy and democratic society which began at the beginning of the 1990s as part of their preparation for EU membership. Equally, transnationality and European added value were not prime programme objectives, but they shaped implementation significantly. The success of programme actions was often based on the expertise of the EU consortia involved in the process and the European Commission, its delegations in CEECs and various EU agencies. These naturally shaped the design of EU interventions displayed in reform developments in CEECs.

The Phare VET reform programme followed the same principle objectives although the specific design varied in each CEEC involved:

(a) modernisation of existing and the development of new curricula for training for a range of broadly defined occupations to meet current market requirements;

(b) support of institutional and policy development in VET and dissemination of pilot school results;
(c) staff development for a wide range of reform participants;
(d) upgrading of pilot school equipment.

The programme was piloted in a limited number of selected vocational schools and was intended to be further disseminated to other schools and to policy level.

At the end of the programme an external assessment was carried out in each country by international consultants. Their reports are considered in the following three cases. The reports are technical assessments of processes and outcomes rather than formative evaluation analyses. They follow Phare assessment practices with a formal approach of assessment against the stated objectives and are therefore summative in nature. However, they do not verify the programme impact and effects of certain reform features: these were an integral part of the programme and so the results of the dissemination of the pilot school experience had to be assessed separately.

The following is a short overview of the Phare VET reform programme in three countries, two of which, the Czech Republic and Slovakia, are fairly similar, considering the split of the former Czech and Slovak Federal Republic. The third example, Bulgaria has a contrasting system of education and training and a distinct cultural context.

2.2. Case study 1: Phare programme CZ 93.05

The collapse of the previous regime and of the planned economy system has placed new demands on the skills of the labour force. VET in the Czech Republic has always enjoyed high participation and esteem. However the VET curricula, qualifications and teaching methods and tools were outdated and could not meet the demands of the new economy. Since 1991 programmes such as Labour Market Restructuring, Renewal of Education System and others have been implemented with the assistance of Phare funds.

2.2.1. The context

A ‘strategic review of VET’ prepared under Labour Market Restructuring suggested recommendations for developing VET in the Czech and Slovak Republics (Birks Sinclair, 1993). Recommendations for the Czech Republic were made to the Ministry of Education, Youth and Sports (MoE). Initially planned funds had to be divided between the two countries after the split of the federation.

Few other national strategy documents were in place but those available were taken into account in drafting the review. The beginning of the 1990s was marked by a strategy and policy framework vacuum and the review was therefore highly valued.

The VET programme was designed to address problems identified in the strategic review. This was not an official policy document and the pressure for change was mainly accession-driven, initiated by the European Commission. It was nevertheless widely supported by actions at a micro level. The period of reform was characterised by bottom-up initiatives, whereas the policy level clearly lagged behind.

The MoE was the principle stakeholder of VET reform. However, it suffered from frequent changes of ministers and key ministry staff. There was no inter-ministerial cooperation, nor was there involvement of social partners.

2.2.2. The programme

The programme was implemented between 1994 and 1998. The Financial memorandum stated the wider objective of the VET programme component: support to development, preparation and restructuring of human resources in and for businesses and public bodies, as required by the economic and social reform programme. The immediate objective was defined as the contribution to long-term reform of VET, as a key element of education, and support of economic reform. The reform programme had objectives defined for each of the seven VET subcomponents, including curricula and pilot school development, staff training, development of up-to-date learning materials, provision of equipment in pilot schools and evaluation of programme results and lessons learned.

Programme implementation was characterised by changes in the reallocation of responsibilities and tasks. The division of responsibilities between the European Training Foundation (ETF), the implementing agency, the European Commission and its delegation was not entirely trans-
parent and resulted in no action in several cases (e.g. mainstreaming the result to the policy level). Others involved were: MoE, Centre for foreign assistance, a national aid coordinator, steering committee with representation of different ministries, advisory task force, a representative body of policy-makers and social partners, international consultants, national experts and in particular the Research Institute of Technical and Vocational Education, which was charged with several tasks and project components. The important involvement of third parties (Ministry of Labour and Social Affairs, social partners and stakeholders for adult training, tertiary education and other educational subsectors) was not fully achieved, especially with regard to implementation of programme results on a larger scale.

2.2.3. Programme results and impact
The investment made in the 19 pilot schools had a significant qualitative impact on their development, however, exposing them to new pedagogical and management practices and teaching methods. It promoted a desire for improvement and efficiency and schools benefited from a study visit abroad and the exchange of knowledge. This encouraged them to take initiatives of their own. Many of the pilot schools proved to be successful project generators and partners in later EU-funded programmes (e.g. LdV, case study 5). A weak point, identified by the evaluation, was that good practices and programme results were not transferred to other, non-pilot schools.

Despite bearing the cost of the programme and its implementation, the MoE did not take up the main programme results and its involvement throughout remained minimal. The evaluation identified this as a major failing not only of the programme implementation but also of its design. The objective of the contribution to the reform of VET did not correspond to the strategy for implementation with its focus on pilot schools and lack of systemic activities. Although the managing unit gave much attention to dissemination activities and public discussion, the lack of receptiveness, interest and acknowledgement of results by the MoE prevented mainstreaming the outputs to national level. In addition the programme arrangement did not involve third parties from the policy level, e.g. the Ministry of Labour, resulting in the lack of linkage to labour-market restructuring and adult training. However recent developments mark a greater strategy-oriented approach in policy-making with long-term planning and clear targets. The programme results certainly contributed to this and although the impact was delayed, the current strategic policy approach would not have been possible without them. Nevertheless, the legislative framework did not provide for further implementation of the programme results. The new bill of the School Act took into account some of the programme results and approval was sought from Parliament on several occasions. However, due to the lack of political consensus each time, it was decided to hold the document for further elaboration.

The programme’s objective of contributing to the restructuring of human resources was not fulfilled, mainly because of the subsectoral approach of the programme, and adult training providers did not participate in the project. VET was tackled in isolation from wider lifelong learning objectives without a specific link to tertiary education, adult training and labour-market restructuring. This was not helpful in meeting the needs of the target groups.

2.2.4. Final programme assessment
The programme assessment sums up the milestones in dissemination activities, including eight thematic reports with analyses of the experience of pilot school activities, three synthetic reports, a draft policy paper (Green Paper), all constituting a major publication From pilot schools to reform strategy and a discussion paper Education for prosperity – Towards the learning society and others. Although the activities significantly contributed to public awareness, they did not result in improving policy-level receptiveness and results mainstreaming. The programme, however, brought about a new culture of interactive dialogue with a wide range of VET reform participants including social partners and different ministries.

The evaluation (OMAS, 1999) assessed the programme against the initial objectives of the subcomponents as stated in the Financial memorandum. The methodology of the assessment, although not clearly stated in the report, was a fairly standard Phare procedure and responded to the requirements of the Terms and reference. The assessors primarily studied the Financial memorandum, the Strategic plan, log frames, the initial strategic report (The strategic review of VET,
Prague 1993), work programmes and reports, conducted interviews with project managers at the Project management unit (PMU – National training fund) and on the project sites and with stakeholders of VET reform. The management unit also performed a self-assessment.

The assessment was somewhat formal, corresponding to standard Phare evaluation guidelines. It did not measure the impact, nor did it perform any follow up study at the level of the target group. Although extensive interviewing took place, the evaluation team did not explore principal drawbacks discovered in accepting the content-related outcomes of the programme. There is little evidence of understanding the intrinsic worth of the programme and no verification of its adequacy to the needs in the context of development and strategy. The feedback from such evaluation was, therefore, limited, despite the awareness of the major problems of the programme setting and implementation.

However, the assessment takes into account the risks and assumptions, with regard to the initial setting, identified in the Financial memorandum, which are mostly management and funding driven. The wider policy-related obstacles and risks were not taken into account in the prior identification. The assessment indicates that the absence of a strategy document for the MoE, prepared prior to the programme implementation, adversely affected implementation. In fact even its need in such a policy document was not acknowledged by the Ministry prior to the programme starting.

The lack of providing indicators in the initial documents introduced the methodological problem; the evaluation report often refers to the lack of measurement of programme impact and lack of relevant statistics. While an important issue, this was not foreseen in the programme. It is, however, unclear why no serious attempt in the impact measurement was not foreseen in the evaluation action itself.

There are few nil links to the strategic review but the log frames were used more actively. This lack of reference can be explained by the formalistic approach of Phare evaluations, where evaluation is targeted to a particular programme, irrespective of its direct linkages to documents and/or activities under preceding or subsequent programmes.

A major drawback in the design of standard Phare programmes is the absence of an ex-ante evaluation, which can thoroughly verify the identified programme objectives, targets and indicators of achievement against priorities and needs based on a comprehensive socioeconomic analysis.

Generally, Phare evaluations were considered by programme participants and partners to be more a threat than a consulting tool. Phare arrangements for evaluations assumed contracting international consortia And, though these involved some local experts, Phare did not contribute significantly to the development of the evaluation culture in the country, nor enhance expertise in evaluations. Evaluation arrangements were settled within the bureaucratic procedures of the Phare programme, instead of being the responsibility of managing structures and policy-makers. The latter therefore perceived evaluations as imposed externally and, naturally, could not see them as a constructive tool for policy planning and adjustment.

2.3. Case study 2: Phare programme SR 94.03

Slovakia, as a former part of the Czech and Slovak Federal Republic, had been among the first countries to conclude association agreements with the EU. However, at that time the Slovak Republic was not included amongst the first wave of five countries to start negotiations for membership. This was partly due to strained political relations between the EU and the previous Slovak governments, especially during the period from 1994 to 1998.

The Phare programme SR 94.03 was one of the first implemented by the ETF on behalf of the European Commission. It is based on a Financial memorandum signed by the Slovak Ministry of Foreign Affairs and Phare on behalf of the European Communities on 10 November 1994.

The programme intended to complete the new curricula for grades 2-4 of vocational schools, provide teacher training for the new methodologies and provide new technological teaching and learning equipment. EU Partnerships should enable schools to continue with future reform efforts. A strong emphasis on the dissemination of results was to prepare for the mainstreaming of the pilot curricula across the national system.
2.3.1. Context of the programme
The Financial memorandum had been signed by a government that went out of office a few weeks later. The government in power during the implementation phase of the programme appears not to support its general objectives and, in 1996, the Minister for Education was involved in a disagreement over a different Phare programme which overshadowed all Phare procedures.

Nevertheless, the Phare VET programme SR 94.03 gave a necessary, timely and unique contribution to the re-positioning and upgrading of VET in the Slovak Republic. It sustained badly needed reform efforts during a period when educational reform was largely neglected. This success was mostly due to the enthusiasm and effort of committed teachers and school managers. Phare initiatives such as this VET programme have been instrumental in enabling Slovak experts and educators to keep in touch with international developments and in relaunching the political integration of Slovakia with the EU and western Europe.

A key element in the terms of reference for long-term assistance, was the preparation of a national strategy. However such a strategy was never developed as there was no direct involvement of main policy-makers in the programme. Social partners have been reluctant to participate in a project which the MoE itself did not fully recognise. This was apparent at the International conference in Mojmirovce in June 1998 which was meant to function as an important means of dissemination but was merely an information event. The logic for the second seminar on dissemination of results in Povazska Bystrica in August 1998 was not clear either. National decision-makers did not become aware of the critical situation for the continuation of VET reform at that time and consequently no measures were contemplated between the summer of 1998 and February 1999. At the Programme review conference on 5 and 6 February 1999 the Minister reaffirmed his commitment to VET reform and became aware that at some schools the experimental classes and curricula were already discontinued. He immediately undertook to rectify this situation.

2.3.2. The programme: objectives and methodology
The following objectives were specified:
(a) to provide the Slovak Government and the ETF with an independent assessment of the achievements of the VET programme, of the relevance and effectiveness of its strategy and activities for the economic transformation and, more specifically, for developing VET with regard to the requirements of a market-driven economy;
(b) to provide an assessment of the implementation of the programme with respect to its management, its effectiveness and direction with reference to its stated objectives.

The methodology can be criticised in that the lack of monitoring and evaluation instruments has impeded self-assessment and reengineering of the programme content and that the evaluation task was hampered by the absence of planning instruments, a clear and logical framework (matrix), performance indicators or achievement targets. However, the evaluation programme itself tried to balance the lack of information with extensive information collection, visits and by a series of instruments of assessment.

The evaluation was based on the analysis of the following source materials:
(a) the central monitoring documents of the Phare programme;
(b) the mid-term evaluation of 1997;
(c) final reports of PMU and the Long-term Technical Assistance (LTA);
(d) reports produced within the programme;
(e) analysis of the programme documentation at the State Vocational Education Institute (ŠIOV);
(f) visits to pilot schools by the evaluation team;
(g) workshop reports of the Programme review conference held on 5 and 6 February 1999;
(h) analysis of questionnaires for pilot school members and non-pilot school teachers;
(i) inputs by independent Slovak educational experts.

Little or no information was obtained as to minutes or documentation of decisions taken at regular meetings of the steering committee, the advisory task force, the national experts responsible for work of the national working groups, the five national working groups, nor of the meetings with the headmasters of the pilot schools or meetings of members/coordinators of the national experts group and/or national working groups with the respective school coordinators. There are two final reports, one prepared by the LTA, the other by experts contracted by the PMU. Neither was discussed and approved by the programme steering committee.
Great importance was attached to the evaluation proceeding in an interactive way. A significant role was assigned to the available central and eastern European and Slovak experts, with the object of stimulating an intensive national debate on the Phare VET programme and its value for future VET policy-making.

2.3.3. Evaluation team
The contract was awarded to a consortium under the lead of Mecca Consulting from Vienna and started on 20 December 1998. The composition of the evaluation team was international, interdisciplinary and wide-ranging. It included experts from the Irish organisation Farrell, Wegimont and Associates, who had already carried out the mid-term evaluation of curricula of this Phare programme in 1997, an experienced evaluator from the Netherlands, an Austrian educational researcher specialising in central and eastern Europe, a VET reform analyst and a PMU Deputy Director of the VET Phare programme in Bulgaria. Slovak members of the evaluation team came from the Vocational Information Resource Centre in the Research Institute of Labour, Social Affairs and Family (VÚPSVR) and the Sociological Research Institute ‘Focus’.

Further Slovak expertise came from those involved in the project, i.e. representatives of the MoE, the PMU, VET teachers and administrators from pilot schools, specialists from ŠIOV and independent national external experts who could provide an objective view on the project, notably from the Slovak Academy of Science, from the VÚPSVR, the National Institute for Education (ŠPU) and the Phare coordinator from the Slovak Government office. The Slovak national observatory on VET and labour market helped with management issues and logistics in Slovakia and was responsible for the organisation of the Programme review conference that took place on 5 and 6 February 1999.

2.3.4. Programme results and impact
The VET programme has been designed and implemented on the basis of two assumptions:
(a) the programme would be successfully implemented in 20 schools;
(b) through dissemination, the new curricula, modules, teacher training methods and methodological expertise, could begin to be mainstreamed throughout the Slovak vocational system.

However, it was not clear from the programme design how this mainstreaming was meant to happen. In addition the political climate during the programme was such that there was little attention and interest from the MoE. The impact of the programme activities on key stakeholders was further weakened by the frequent changes of participants and institutions involved. The attitude of the MoE during and after the programme is reflected in the poor integration of programme and system:
(a) the excellent curricula developed were only accredited for pilot classes and no provision existed for their transfer to other classes or schools;
(b) the teacher training achievements had not translated into a national practice;
(c) the EU partnerships and infrastructure procurement could not, for purely financial reasons, be continued;
(d) dissemination activities, as far as they were carried out during the programme, had not led to a permanent means of circulation and exchange of information.

Two representative findings of the evaluation epitomise this:
(a) some of the pilot schools (e.g. pilot school 19, the Electro-technical school in Bratislava) had already ceased first grade classes under the now already unofficial pilot school curricula;
(b) the crucial issue of the diploma for graduates of modular curricula remained unresolved.

The government however, expressed a stronger interest in the valorisation of results, e.g.:
(a) there were indications that the MoE under the new Minister would carry out a comprehensive assessment of the programme’s results and the evaluators urged this to take place as soon as the first alumni finish their studies in June 1999;
(b) there was a commitment to amend the current diploma award to correspond to the pre-existing diploma (possibly with a reference to the broader and additional education and training the students received).

Under these circumstances, sustainability of the programme was far from assured. If no additional donor support was forthcoming, further use
of the products would depend exclusively on the decisions – and actions – of the MoE. Public statements by the Minister are supportive but the prospect of mainstreaming is still bleak.

The failure to provide the necessary legal framework for the horizontal mode of dissemination through pilot schools results in the fully equipped pilot schools not fulfilling their role. Consequently this potentially powerful tool of dissemination is ineffective in furthering the aims of VET reform. Here ŠIOV intervened with a traditional top-down model of dissemination through publications and conferences. Since the application of educational products of the other programme components were restricted to the pilot schools, this exercise was largely futile. The development of a national VET reform strategy was touched upon by two leading experts during the final conference, but its realisation remained a task for the future.

2.3.5. Final programme assessment
In summary, no systematic monitoring occurred, little transparent documentation was available and there was no procedural or political control. Initiatives took place at the inclination of individuals.

The lack of monitoring and means of evaluation has impeded self-assessment and the reengineering of programme content and the evaluation task was hampered by the absence of a planning instrument, a clear and logical framework (matrix), performance indicators or achievement targets.

In the terms of reference for continuing long-term assistance the preparation of a national strategy was a key element of the programme. For several reasons such a national strategy was never developed. There was no direct involvement of main policy-makers in the Phare VET reform programme.

2.4. Case study 3: Phare programme BG 96.04
The programme was based on a Financial memorandum signed by the then Bulgarian Minister for Education, Science and Technology and Phare on behalf of the European Communities, on 8 March 1996. Programme BG 95.06 was a direct continuation of the VET component of the previous Phare programme BG 93.14-02 (post-secondary vocational training project). This earlier programme had produced a general strategy for upgrading VET and had developed relevant practice and expertise (including standards compatible with the EU), covering five professional branches.

The need for reform in Bulgarian VET had been often misunderstood as an attempt to underestimate the achievements and misinterpret the difficulties of the Bulgarian system during the transitional phase to a market economy. The title selected for the Phare intervention in vocational education correctly places the emphasis on the need to upgrade, rather than reform, substitute or reinvent an education, training or science system.

2.4.1. The context
The programme’s seven components were intended ‘to contribute to economic and social reform in Bulgaria through the development of education, vocational training, science and technology and to ensure the availability of national human resources for economic and social restructuring’. Nevertheless, the combination of subprogrammes appears to have arisen from a confused position of the then government and thus provided limited potential for synergy: Upgrading VET, Teacher Career Paths, Foreign Language Training, Financial Management for School Education, Development of Science and Technology, School Drop-outs in General Education, a Higher Education Evaluation and Accreditation Agency, a Science Park feasibility study and the PMU.

In comparison with other Phare VET activities in central and eastern Europe, the Bulgarian VETERST programme had a positive reputation. The programme has supported continuing reform in a difficult and volatile environment. The government’s ownership of reform guarantees that its successes will be sustained. The results of the programme have started the upgrading of Bulgarian education, especially to meet the requirements of the acquis communautaire to facilitate accession of Bulgaria to the EU.

The evaluation did recognise political and cultural circumstances; for example, three Bulgarian evaluators were included along with the three EU experts.
2.4.2. Programme assessment: dissemination and mainstreaming

The evaluation was based on the analysis of the following source materials:

(a) the central monitoring documents of the Phare programme;
(b) the intermediate assessment of OMAS (as part of a general assessment of all Phare activities);
(c) final reports of PMU and Consultants for all subprogrammes;
(d) reports produced within the programme;
(e) analysis of the programme documentation at the PMU and pilot schools;
(f) interviews at and visits to the Ministries of Education and Labour, pilot schools, regional authorities and institutions set up during the programme by the evaluation team;
(g) the work groups reports of the programme valorisation meeting held on 14 February 2000;
(h) analysis of questionnaires for programme recipients;
(i) inputs by independent Bulgarian educational experts.

Great importance was attached to the evaluation proceeding interactively. A significant role was assigned to the available central and eastern European and Bulgarian experts, with the object of stimulating intensive national debate on the Phare VET programme and its value for future VET policy-making.

Dissemination in the programme was carried out through information leaflets and brochures like *Outlook*, published by the PMU and information brochures published by the project offices. However, the failure to provide the necessary legal framework for the horizontal mode of dissemination through pilot schools created a situation where the fully equipped pilot schools were not allowed to fulfil this role in the best way. The project management stepped in with a traditional top-down model of dissemination through publications and conferences and information packages for non-pilot schools. Because the application of educational products of the other programme components was restricted to the pilot schools, this exercise remained suboptimal.

It is impossible to give a general judgement on the dissemination activities for the VETERST programme because of its subprogrammes and their diverging results, successes and difficulties.

The emphasis on pilot studies and methods, administrative procedures and financial matters reduced dissemination and the impact of continued activities to a marginal subtask. At the end of the programme, the difficult economic and financial environment any follow-up activities had to face adversely affected their potential.

Although the MoE should have accepted mainstream implementation of programme results by formal declaration, no actions were undertaken in this respect. This was openly criticised in the evaluation. However recent developments have marked a more strategy-oriented approach in policy-making with long-term planning and clear targets, the programme results certainly being a factor in this. Although the impact was delayed, the current strategic policy approach would not have been possible without the programme results. Legislation did not provide for further implementation of the programme results at the end of the programme but measures were introduced later. Planning strategy had also been driven by the programming of pre-accession activities and structural funding work.

2.4.3. Evaluation team

The contract was awarded to the Swedish consulting firm AmuGruppen from Stockholm and started on 20 December 1999. The evaluation team was international, inter-disciplinary and wide-ranging. Bulgarian members of the team came from the New Bulgarian University, from the Economic University and the National Institute of Education. The team also included an Austrian evaluator with specific VET experience, an experienced VET university teacher and an evaluator from the UK, a VET reform analyst from Sweden and a British NGO Director resident in Bulgaria while implementing other EU programmes there.

Further Bulgarian expertise came from those involved in the project, i.e. representatives of the Bulgarian Ministry of Education and Sports, the PMU, VET teachers and administrators from pilot schools, specialists from research institutes and independent national external experts who could provide an objective view on the project, notably from the Bulgarian Academy of Science, from the National Employment Institute and the National Institute of Education. The Bulgarian national observatory on VET and labour market (which became part of the Human resources development centre) helped with organisational issues.
and logistics in Bulgaria and was responsible for the organisation of the programme valorisation meeting which took place on 14 February 2000 in Sofia.

2.4.4. Final programme assessment
Where programmes are running in parallel in different countries or regions, coordinated support and collaboration between programme coordinators and managers, through joint meetings and networking is invaluable. Similarly, institution building in the competent ministries needs special attention.

Project management capacity needs to comply with EU procedures but the need for administrators to exchange ideas is also to be recognised. The new VET modules required in Bulgaria are similar to those already in use in other countries. These could be adapted and used as a starting point for fine-tuning modules, courses and curricula on Europe-wide key competences.

Knowledge sharing and support needs to continue to be planned for and resourced after the project is finished. Legal requirements, development, dissemination and the increasing experience and abilities of project partners (e.g. school level) need to be recognised and be part of project plans, especially in the case of teachers implementing modular curricula for application in other schools.

It is also important to ensure the cooperation of regional inspectorates and the Institute for teachers’ qualifications by including this aspect in follow up plans.

The re-shaping of social partner organisations since the start of transition has generated considerable activity. Education, especially continuous training, is a field where social partners in the EU are assuming a greater role than their original remit. VET could become, therefore, a major interest for social partners as a field where they have influence at all levels. This might raise their status here and in other EU countries help in their development in central and eastern Europe.

Large scale mainstreaming of the pilot results to the national system requires a proper framework:

(a) consensus on goals and strategies;
(b) agreement between the main participants;
(c) adequate funding for implementation;
(d) clear objectives and a cost benefit analysis for Bulgarian VET.

Sustainability should be achieved by building upon the effect of the programme on the recipients increased expertise and abilities to develop and share with others programme results.

2.5. Case study 4: transnational analysis of national academic recognition information centres (NARICs)

2.5.1. The context
The first indications of the commitment of the European Institutions to mutual academic recognition are to be found in the Treaty of Rome in 1957 (4), but it was not until 24 years later, in 1981, that the concept of a network of national information centres emerged and a further two years before it was implemented. The evolution of the NARIC network is fully described from different perspectives in the evaluation.

The main aim of NARIC is:
(a) ‘to remove anomalies, misunderstandings and injustices resulting from the widespread lack of authoritative information on equivalence matters among the Member States;
(b) to obviate any confusion cases of individual hardship, resulting from the lack of any Community-wide system or network of agreements on the academic equivalence and comparability of the very wide range of diplomas, certificates and qualifications […];
(c) to enable higher education institutes to be better informed of the new developments of new types of degree courses in other Member States […];
(d) to eliminate a major obstacle currently impeding student mobility in the Community’ (5).

This shows that the major focus is on the development of NARICs within the EU. In the evalua-

(4) Treaty of Rome, Articles 49, 57.1 and 128.
tion, the NARIC network was also compared to the European network of national information centres on academic recognition and mobility (ENIC), which was established in 1994 by merging the existing, respective networks of the Council of Europe (NEIC) and of Unesco-CEPES (6) (NIB).

2.5.2. The programme
The early days of the Erasmus programme, under which recognition centres are financed, can be regarded as the basis for the NARIC network. The system was established under the Erasmus (1989-96) and tested over six years in a pilot scheme involving 145 higher education institutions from all EU Member States and the European Economic Area (EEA) countries. Since the introduction of the institutional contract in the Socrates/Erasmus programme in 1997/98, all European universities can take part in the European credit transfer system (ECTS). The ECTS supports European-wide mobility as an effective means of promoting curricular transparency and facilitating academic recognition. Transparency is created by providing detailed information on the curricula and their relevance to a degree. The main tools used to make ECTS work and facilitate academic recognition are the information package, the learning agreement and the transcript of records. The use of ECTS in vocationa training is currently under discussion (7). The new structure is being piloted in a number of projects across the EU, both in higher and vocational education.

The responsibility for identifying the roles and tasks of recognition centres rests with the national authorities (MoE). They therefore differ in nature and scope, reflecting the structural make up of every member country of the network. In the early days of the NARIC network, the Commission attempted to define common roles and tasks for the national centres to assist those national authorities developing their recognition centres. Several stakeholders were part of the evaluation. Representatives of the following organisations were interviewed: Euro-citizen action service, Quality assurance agency for higher education, the national unions of students in Europe, Erasmus student network, European university association, section of the European trade union confederation (ETUC), European forum for academic orientation and the Union of industrial and employers’ confederations of Europe.

2.5.3. Methodology of the evaluation
The key issues for the evaluation of the network were:
(a) an assessment of the relevance and added value of the NARIC network ‘in terms of promoting the European dimension in academic recognition’;
(b) an assessment of the efficiency and effectiveness of the NARIC network ‘in achieving its objectives and tasks’.

The evaluation covered five years, i.e. 1997 to 2001 and aimed to identify ‘useful lessons and recommendations for the future activities of the Network, including its ability to meet the challenges of the development of transnational education in general and of the Bologna process in particular.’ Eleven specific evaluative questions were formulated in the terms of reference.

Members of the NARIC network are those national organisations responsible, at national level, for recognition of foreign degrees (recognition centres). The terms of reference made a distinction between the activities of the NARIC network and the activities developed at national level by these recognition centres. The NARIC network emerged, therefore, as an entity distinct from its members; while the network was subject to evaluation, the members were not, as they were subject to the control of their national authorities. The NARIC network had to be assessed as an entity formed by its members (the recognition centres), which is conceptually distinct and different from them. The evaluation was monitored by a steering committee composed of European Commission, Directorate-General for Education and Culture (DG EAC) staff.

The evaluation was conceived as a desk research study but supported by substantial field work. The following evaluative instruments were used:

(6) CEPES is the Bucharest-based European higher education centre of Unesco.
(a) a considerable number of documents were examined in order to understand the history of the network, its mission, its legal basis, its developments and activities, the cooperation with ENIC and their network and to understand and appreciate its on-going activities and main achievements. Particular attention was paid to understanding the difference between the NARIC activities of national nature (not covered by the mandate) and those of networking nature;

(b) non-structured interviews with staff of DG EAC to understand the nature of the subject in question and to gather data;

(c) analysis of the files and outcomes of the recognition centre projects financed by DG EAC during the period and their assessment by means of a standard ‘project evaluation card’;

(d) preparation of a questionnaire sent to all recognition centres;

(e) case studies of recognition centres;

(f) an analysis of communication within the ENIC discussion list;

(g) a textual analysis of the websites of 25 recognition centres;

(h) interviews with informed external stakeholders;

(i) design of scenarios.

2.5.4. Evaluation team
The contract was awarded to the coordinator of the Pragmatic network of individual European consultants. The evaluation team was composed of an international consortium of consultants from Austria, Bulgaria, the Czech Republic, Italy, Norway and the UK.

The Austrian expertise came from a Vienna based group of international evaluators. The Bulgarian evaluators had long-standing experience in European projects. The contribution from Italy was provided by an independent consultant, whose key areas of specialisation are project management, ex-ante and ex-post programmes evaluation. The consultant from the Czech Republic is a researcher at Charles University in Prague with experience in web-publishing and information management. The Norwegian owns a consulting company, specialising in knowledge-based services and regional development. The UK evaluator is a school inspector and university manager.

Eight informed stakeholders were interviewed to gain their understanding of the NARIC network, the nature of their institutional relations with it, their degree of satisfaction and their expectations. These organisations were regular partners or counterparts of DG EAC.

The terms of reference had been produced by the evaluation steering group at the Commission, with input and representation from the recognition centres. The continuous monitoring of evaluation progress, substantial comment on draft and final reports and close attention of the steering group resulted in worthwhile and valuable evaluation results and recommendations. However, direct contact with the recognition centres was limited and took place mostly in a mediated form. Several recognition centres perceived the evaluation exercise as a threat and were reluctant to provide information. Several other recognition centres, in contrast, took a much more positive view which added to the evaluation output. Some recognition centres asked evaluators for a copy of their own interview and recommendations, going beyond the original evaluation remit and adding value to the process.

However, a comprehensive analysis of the network environment was not in the terms of reference and this limited the evaluation and findings to network internal and narrow issues. The multinational composition of the evaluation team proved to be useful as interviewees’ requests to be covered by selected evaluators could be met (e.g. the Bulgarian recognition centre refused to be interviewed by their Bulgarian peer who was then substituted by another EU national). The project shows the importance of consulting external stakeholders during an evaluation. If only working with project members, there is a danger that a wider audience will get a distorted picture of the project, its relevance to other projects or developments and its results in terms of dissemination and sustainability.

2.5.5. Programme results and impact
The study revealed that most recognition centres agreed that the Bologna process has significant impact in terms of commitment and workload. With the exception of one NARIC, all respondents agreed that the Bologna process has increased the need for frequent network interactions (this involved both the NARIC and the ENIC dimension) and that the Bologna process is having a major impact in terms of workload.
Impact in terms of commitment was uneven and directly proportional to the part played by the organisation managing the NARIC. Reported were mainly political activities at international and national level and dissemination actions (seminars, workshops). The need for finding common platforms with the European network for quality assurance in higher education (ENQA) had been underlined. Most recognition centres reported considerably increased commitment with only one NARIC recording none.

Finally, apart from one exception, there is a unanimous consensus that the Bologna process has been a catalyst for new opportunities for recognition centres. Many recognition centres refer to increased international visibility of both ENIC and the NARIC network. Individual contributions refer to the following as new opportunities: the prospect of contributing to national policy-making in education; assessment of non-regulated qualifications; development of contacts with labour-market partners to improve information and training on recognition issues; role of recognition in lifelong learning including assessment of informal and non-formal learning; further opportunities to promote the Diploma supplement; increased differentiation of evaluation scale; focus on the cooperation between recognition and quality assurance; need to develop new attitudes to recognition. Some respondents stressed that national authorities should be made aware of the consequences of the Bologna process in terms of workload for the organisations managing recognition centres; urgent countermeasures need to be taken in terms of human resources. 90 % of respondents consider that the follow-up of the Bologna process will have a definite impact on the NARIC network activities in next three years.

2.5.6. Final programme assessment
The NARIC network is available to those national bodies responsible for implementing policies about recognition and transparency of qualifications (the recognition centres). It provides an invaluable forum for the exchange of ideas, experience and information between recognition centres, at national level.

While the control of single recognition centres is the responsibility of their national administrations, the evaluators considered that the NARIC network had an alarmingly low level of formal, institutional structuring. Its mandate was contained in few words of the European Commission Decision establishing Socrates II (8); the role and powers of the European Commission were not enshrined in any formal act. The role and the powers of the NARIC advisory board were unclear, incomplete and not formally adopted. As a result, the network was scarcely visible and its lack of a single point of entry or contact was a source of criticism. Relations with the NARIC network were through the Commission, or one of its Members. As a managed consequence, the distinction between the different bodies (recognition centres vs. NARIC network) and their respective reporting lines, was not always clear.

The inability of the NARIC network to respond to recent developments (notably the Bologna process) had been criticised by several recognition centres and stakeholders. Again, the performance of the network was in question, not recognition centres (9) due to poorly defined network structure, roles of those involved and rules. There was a suggestion that the scope of the network should be expanded beyond that assigned by the Socrates II decision. This development met the wishes of most of those involved, but required a formal process leading to the adoption of comprehensive terms of reference for the network, the identification of participants, the allocation of clear roles and responsibilities and the approval of internal rules. Structured long term planning cycles also needed to be adopted and, in the absence of such processes, the development of the network was destined to be a source of further problems.

During the evaluation facts emerged that suggested that several recognition centres were severely understaffed. This could have affected the performances of the NARIC network, which was the responsibility of the European Commis-

(8) ‘In particular, it will collect and disseminate authenticated information which is necessary for the purpose of academic recognition, also bearing in mind synergies with the professional recognition of diplomas.’

(9) The situation, although not analysed because of the mandate received, was different in the case of several recognition centres, which reportedly had been quick to adapt their structure and some of their working practices to the recent developments.
sion. The NARIC network and the European Commission were advised to take appropriate action. The European Commission had earmarked funds for financing activities related to the recognition of diplomas. Their impact on the overall Socrates budget decreased over time from 0.16 % (1995) to 0.09 % (2001). They were being used to finance activities of different nature:
(a) projects of national interest;
(b) projects of bilateral interest;
(c) projects of network interest.

Projects of networking interest had been relevant overall to the scope of the network and mainly proved to be effective, with a positive impact on the network and the activities of the recognition centres. Projects of national and bilateral interest were designed to support the recognition centres locally (i.e. nationally) and had minimal impact on the network. This helped in strengthening the national dimension (the recognition centres), while the corroboration of the very network dimension was less supported.

The relationship of yearly priorities and projects to be financed must be observed and adequate inter-network collaboration developed.

There was a strong sense of identity among recognition centres, going beyond the NARIC network and covering all countries where ENIC is represented. The recognition centres largely cooperated with each other and were responsive to requests for support from colleagues in other countries. This is a key element for success in redefining the competences of the network. The many differences in roles, national support and staff of the recognition centres have to be taken into account if they are to be able to support and implement the activities proposed by the network in a pro-active way.

2.6. Case study 5: LdV I in the Czech Republic

2.6.1. The context

LdV (10) is ‘an action programme for implementation of a Community vocational training policy which supports and supplements the action of the Member States, while fully respecting the responsibility of the Member States for the content and organisation of vocational training and excluding any harmonisation of the laws and regulations of the Member States’ (European Commission, 1994, p. 10). Here is the first inconsistency: being transnational in nature, the programme seeks to keep the status quo in national responsibilities and the diverse systems of education and training but assumes an added value from the promotion of the European-type transnational project.

The Council Decision sets out a common framework of objectives, measures and priorities. The programme priorities and measures were identified prior to the start of the programme and took into account experience with previous community actions (Commett, Eurotechnet, Force, Petra, Lingua). The compatibility with national priorities and strategies was assured by the representation of the Member State in the programme Committee (see further). The common framework of objectives and the list of measures and priorities were defined in an extremely broad manner. While this permitted the accommodation of interests and needs of various target groups and countries with the diverse character of national systems, this approach lacked a clear focus and encouraged supply-driven projects.

The Council Decision also set out the requirement for evaluations ‘at regular intervals on a partnership basis involving the Commission and the Member States’, including the results of Community measures that were to ‘be evaluated objectively by outside bodies at regular intervals.

(10) The case study deals with the first phase of the LdV programme only.
However the procedure was defined in rather vague terms where a proposal was to be made by the Commission but the Programme Committee was to give its opinion on the matter. Consequently, the evaluation procedure for the programme interim and final results and the programme effectiveness, efficiency, adequacy of measures to the needs of target groups and other evaluation aspects were not clearly defined at the start of the programme.

The Council Decision (1994) opened the LdV programme to the associated CEECs and after the appropriate preparatory work the countries gained full membership in the programme. The Czech Republic has been participating in the programme since 1996 with a full-membership status since 1997.

2.6.2. The programme

Unlike Member States, the CEECs’ entrance to the programme was preceded by an ex-ante study aimed at identifying national priorities in VET, the capacity of the systems and arrangements of these countries to participate in the programme, an ex-ante evaluation of the potential impact of the programme on policies and practices in these countries and formulation of specific proposals for the participation of these countries in the programme (Handley et al., 1996). Although the study was prepared by a team of international experts, it involved drafting national background reports by local experts and a fairly broad consultation process with national authorities of the six countries involved in the study (Bulgaria, Czech Republic, Hungary, Poland, Romania and Slovakia). The study analysed the major challenges arising from the related socio-economic and legislative situation in the countries concerned and drew up specific recommendations with regard to the identification of country-specific priorities and programme procedures to be implemented in central and eastern Europe in order to maximise the programme impact in these countries.

The study highlights the delicate nature of the transition process. The reform of education and training had to tackle the major issue of contributing to the overall democratisation of the society and upgrading and adjusting the outdated education programmes to the quickly changing needs of the transforming economy. It also had to face the challenge of preparedness to accession needing to catch up with requirements and strategies at the EU level. The study foresaw, therefore, the likelihood of ‘an impact on internal priority needs as well as those associated with the preparation for participation in the wider European family’ (Handley et al., 1996, p. 4).

The broad nature of the LdV programme allowed the national priorities of CEECs to be accommodated easily, though with certain specificities. For instance, the programme being ‘a transnational laboratory for innovation’ did not assume a linear transfer of know-how from west to east (this in fact was largely done in the framework of the Phare programme). However such a transfer was a natural need, especially at the early stage of the programme. This was not only because of objective underdevelopment but more often a lack of experience in transnational collaboration and project management skills and low self-confidence on the part of central and eastern European institutions and individuals (11). The LdV programme expected a European added value, while for the CEECs national level impacts could be more important.

The suggestion of the ex-ante study (1996) to take into account the national priorities in the preparation of national calls for proposals and selection of projects was, therefore, in conflict with the LdV programme, which was oriented on transnational action and simply lacked a procedure for giving more weight to national priorities. The study pointed out the need to reinforce the acknowledgement of national needs of candidate countries, bearing in mind that in many CEECs LdV represented a major financial source in VET. It also suggested that scarce financial resources be maximised by selecting the projects with a systemic and/or policy impact. It failed, however, to suggest means of achieving such a requirement in the procedural context of the programme.

(11) This can be confirmed by the fact that with increased experience in the programme participation, some central and eastern European promoters proved to be successful in competing in project selection and in introducing innovative ideas and products in the transeuropean perspective.
The transnational nature of the programme and the lack of a mechanism which recognised national priorities do not explain why CEECs were not properly consulted in the annual identification of priorities in the standard LdV calls. The representation of the opinion of Member States was ensured through the programme Committee, which constituted a body assisting the Commission in the programme delivery, composed of two representatives from each Member State (European Commission, 1994; Article 6). CEECs’ representatives have had the right to participate in the work of the Committee since 1998 but with observer status only and on a number of occasions were not given the opportunity to express opinions at all (12).

The representatives of the LdV national agency considered that the national priorities at the beginning of the programme were not taken into account because there was limited project capacity at the level of promoters. The National Coordination Unit’s strategy of including as many and varied institutions as possible resulted in a great number of institutions, previously inexperienced in international cooperation, gaining experience of international cooperation and knowledge of project management. A project culture has emerged leading to the success of Czech projects in recent LdV calls. Development of project generation and management skills is also important in respect of future structural funds intervention (13).

The study pointed out that many Phare projects were pilot in nature and therefore micro-focused and that LdV may develop similar problems, if the appropriate dissemination and effect multiplying activities are not foreseen at an early stage. The major impact of the programme was identified as the new partnership based method of cooperation with Member States institutions (unlike donor-recipient relations in other programmes) and in the forging of new relations with the EU. Wider impacts than those arising from the VET innovations were therefore expected.

Because of the fluid and dynamic nature of developments in the CEECs, the ex-ante study proposed annual reviews and subsequently adapting national priorities, ensuring clear links with national strategies in VET. Achieving the optimal impact on national systems assumed a number of arrangements in monitoring and evaluations. The study suggested evaluating the implementation experience after the completion of preparatory measures (14) and in the second-year of projects proposed by CEECs and, in fact, assumed continuing evaluation as such. The ex-ante analysis also indicated a lack of evaluation capacity in the CEECs and the need to reinforce evaluation skills and work by training the national coordination unit staff. Also needed were appropriate instruments and clearly identified rationales, procedures and beneficiaries for evaluations (Handley et al., 1996; p. 55). This, however, needed a plan from the European Commission with a distinct allocation of responsibilities and evaluation activities at various levels. Such a strategy was lacking and the terms of reference for national coordination units was very vague with regard to evaluations. It was not clear whether any regular evaluation assignment is expected or whether any specific evaluation will be needed on request from the European Commission. In any case, monitoring and evaluation in LdV I was not designed as a comprehensive system with a clear framework, indicators and methodology.

The study results and suggestions were hardly taken into account at later stages of the programme, nor were they consulted in the national evaluation activities. The overall justification of the study is therefore unclear, although main findings appear both adequate and useful. The programme also did not produce a complex ex-ante analysis for all countries involved (EU and central and eastern Europe) before the start of the programme and prior to formulation of priorities and measures. The expected impact of the programme therefore was never identified at an early stage as clear quality indicators and quantified goals were not in place. These had an important effect on later evaluations and the programme

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(12) Results of interviews with Czech LdV national agency representatives.
(13) Results of interviews with Czech LdV national agency representatives.
(14) The country dossiers initiated by ETF covered major elements of VET and LdV priorities of candidate countries contributed to preparatory measures of the programme. However, follow up evaluation of benefits of LdV to the national needs was undertaken and the dossiers remained a self-existent informative document.
attained almost a linear cycle, where the provision of the feedback from evaluations for adjustment and strategic planning was limited.

2.6.3. Main findings: programme results and impact

Article 10(3) of the Council Decision asked countries to produce ‘national reports’ on implementation of the first phase of the LdV programme. All Member States and some CEECs produced such reports between 1999 and 2000. Not all CEECs were engaged in the activity because of their delayed involvement the programme and therefore finalised projects largely did not exist. For the same reason CEECs were not involved in the full-scale impact assessment and presented an interim report produced either by their national coordination units or by an external evaluator. Clear evaluation guidelines were not provided to the national level nor was it clearly stated whether the exercise should be performed externally or internally.

The Czech national coordination unit decided to perform two tasks. First, it produced a report which focused on the purpose of the programme, its results and influence on VET and employment in the period between 1996 and 1999 with a view to producing recommendations for the next phase of the programme (NCU/NTF, 1999). Second, an external evaluation was produced by three independent experts in 2001, specifically aimed at valorisation of major results and best practices of the programme in the Czech Republic (NA/NTF, 2002). Each of the documents had a different aims which was of worth in itself. While the first was formative in nature, the second presented some aspects of the summative evaluation.

The first report (1999) followed the European Commission outline and provided some contextual analyses of education and training and assessed the impact of the programme in quantitative and qualitative terms. Because projects were still in progress, a proper impact analysis was not possible. The report did not verify the estimated impact of the ex-ante analysis nor could it verify the qualitative or quantitative indicators of achievements, as those had not been set out at the earlier stage. It did however arrive at some important conclusions. As assumed in the ex-ante analysis, the programme had its major impact at the micro level. The major benefit of the programme was considered to be in the placement and exchange measures, particularly in respect of the improvement of individual’s professional competences and foreign language skills.

Acquaintance with foreign VET, project-design and management skills and transnational cooperation were significant aspects of the programme. The results reported came mostly from regional and local VET. At the same time the programme showed evidence of the rapid increase in the number of Czech institutions involved in the programme during the fast-changing and unstable conditions of the transition period and in the shorter period of the programme compared to Member States. The programme also resulted in a number of valuable innovations, especially new educational products (modules, study materials, educational software, etc.) and contributed to harmonisation of Czech methods in VET with those in the EU Member States. The report assumed that these innovative results will later be adopted not only at the regional and local levels but also by sectors and at national level.

In many cases this was subject to the receptiveness of the national authorities and to legislation. The report did not provide the analysis of major barriers for mainstreaming good practices and innovations. It pointed out the qualitative change in the political context where major strategic documents on education and employment were explained, publicly discussed and accepted at the policy level. However, these documents provided a general vision, a strategic framework, while the legislative side remained stagnant and unreceptive to innovations. For example, many projects focused on development of modular training while the bill of the new School Act, which gives the opportunity to introduce modular training, was rejected by parliament. Mainstreaming of innovations, therefore, is often subject to legislative openness and the ability of systems to take on board the results of experimentation. The analysis of existing systemic and legal barriers appears therefore to be very useful in future.

The second report, an external evaluation study of 2002, clearly presented a methodology developed by the National agency (15) on the basis of the experience of Member States that

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(15) The National coordination unit was transformed into the National agency in 2000.
conducted such evaluations earlier. The evaluation aimed at a twofold objective: assessment of the impact of the first phase of LdV in the three aforementioned areas at the local, regional and national levels; and identification of the best quality products and recommendations for valorisation. This report, along with a number of valorisation seminars, contributed to the valorisation initiative of the European Commission.

Valorisation in the Czech Republic was focused on identifying projects with a high potential for exploiting their results on a large scale and on a wide dissemination of information (NCU/NTF, 2002; p. 56). In addition to the evaluation report, the Czech national agency ran a number of dissemination workshops and a conference and drafted standardised project fiches for projects identified as of high potential impact. The authors of the evaluation report highlighted the problems of carrying out impact assessment when many projects were just being finalised or were only recently completed: a longer-term perspective for the impact evaluation was felt as a need. Therefore, the evaluation report focused on a potential, more than an actual, impact. This corresponded to the proactive valorisation strategy introduced by the European Commission. Nevertheless, the real impact may be useful to evaluate in the ex-post evaluation, although such a phase does not seem to be part of the LdV programme sequence.

The evaluation (2002) was voluntary and carried out at the end of LdV I projects. The methodology and the terms of reference for evaluators were drafted by the National agency, as no joint methodology was provided from the European Commission (16). The evaluation in the Czech Republic was performed by three external experts, each representing an area of LdV: secondary and higher vocational education, tertiary education labour market and employment. While the decision to allocate the task to three independent experts in the three, possibly most, important areas of the programme was methodologically straightforward and an intelligent move, it contained one drawback: such a division prevents a complex look being taken at the programme impact by focusing on the linkage between training and employment or the contribution of innovations to lifelong learning in initial and continuing training.

The evaluation (2002) did return to the identified impact in the ex-ante study. However the Czech part of the ex-ante study was very weak and only the synthetic analysis could be used as a point of reference and reflections. This however was not required by the European Commission. If the report of 1999 followed the programme results according to the shortened and simplified version of the common framework of the programme objectives, this was not the case of the later evaluation (2002). In fact neither of the two concentrated on programme achievements by priority and measure. This is unsurprising as there were too many objectives, measures and priorities to perform a focused analysis. The evaluation, lacking the overall strategic framework for the programme at national level and therefore lacking the initial point of reference for the programme evaluation, was attempted to be incorporated into the broader strategic framework. It compared the programme objectives with the national priorities identified in two major and relatively recent documents: National programme of development of education (the White Book) and the Human resource development strategy. A considerable correlation of objectives and priorities was identified, which clearly demonstrated the contribution of LdV programme to national developments. Methodologically this was an instant solution which attempted to compensate for a thorough ex-ante analysis of the national strategy and priorities with regard to the LdV programme and the specific needs of target groups in the Czech Republic. The situation is exacerbated by the Czech Republic’s lack of strategic policy vision and practically no crucial policy documents. The policy vacuum at the start of the programme was not, therefore, compensated for by a proper needs analysis or any strategic programme planning.

The programme evaluation of 2002 in the Czech Republic did not include the context analysis, nor the analysis of the legal and system framework. Consequently, although many successful projects and useful products were identified, it was not possible to estimate the likelihood of mainstreaming results, despite efforts

(16) Information from the interviews with the National agency representatives.
by the National agency to extend the life of successful projects afterwards. It is well recognised that the best innovations can be lost if not incorporated into legislation and in the Czech Republic many innovative products are at risk due to the lack of legal provision for modular training, competence-based systems of qualification, continuing training of adults and the weak role of social partners and little financing. Unfortunately, neither national evaluation documents of LdV provided a thorough analysis of the barriers to mainstreaming best practices and products and ways of overcoming them.

An important finding of the programme impact was that international cooperation presents a value in itself. While implementation of international projects is complex and challenging and has to take into account legislative, cultural and systemic contexts, it is very rewarding. Meeting these challenges helps build new skills and provides new experiences among those involved. This was important for CEECs, whose experience in generating and implementing international projects was only recent. As with the previous evaluation, the major programme impact was identified at the micro level, i.e. at the regional, local, company or individual level, depending on the project and the specific problem tackled. In the latter case, most projects stemming from identified problems naturally tackled Czech-specific problems. Many projects however, exceeded expectations, with a special European dimension. Many innovative products were developed: elaboration of modules and credits, handbooks, multimedia training materials, methodologies of quality assessment, etc.

An interesting feature of the Czech projects was noticed in the evaluation (NCU/NTF, p. 37): innovation was more common in teaching methods than in the content of education not just in those projects where Czech institutions were partners but also for Czech-generated projects. This was because the Czech institutions, although they generally followed their more experienced western partners’ priorities, also had their own. This was also a pragmatic approach, with fewer obstacles expected in mainstreaming teaching methods compared to innovated educational programmes. Many upgraded programmes produced under the Phare programme remained ‘pilot’ for a long time, lacking the interest of policy-makers and a legislative mechanism. System settings sometimes present barriers in disseminating good practice on a larger scale. For example, LdV did not produce the results initially expected in linking teaching and research in Czech higher education. As in all CEECs the division of research and teaching in higher education was due to the Academy of Social Sciences being a dominant research organisation and the existence of a number of sectoral institutions with narrow-focused and applied research and development activities. Although the process of transformation saw the reduction of much sectoral research and the role of the Academy diminish, the system overall continued and was major obstacle in the large-scale implementation of research and innovation in universities (idem, p. 38).

The likelihood of cooperation and the effectiveness of projects involving universities and SMEs could be improved by the State by proactive policy measures aimed at supporting research and development in small businesses. The report suggests more support measures are needed in creating requirements for the transfer of knowledge and innovations by developing networks of SMEs with high innovation potential. The report cites as an obstacle: ‘The surviving orientation of the State on solving current short-term problems in large industrial corporations or in the banking sector is a serious obstacle in our conditions. Innovative enterprises are not sufficiently supported and they do not stand in the centre of interest of the political elite’ (idem, p. 39).

The evaluators concluded that this situation does not support the multiplying effect of innovative projects among SMEs, so the impact is small. The few projects that act on the situation and try to make use of foreign experience are of great importance. Changes in the content of education, quality of practical training and human resource development and increased product competitiveness are important results.

The report indicates that the greatest impact was achieved by projects that attempted to meet the needs of a broader group of institutions, beyond the partnership (idem, p. 66). It can be concluded that inadequate results and limited impact are often ‘caused not by unsuccessful realisation of the project, but by a significant difference in conditions in which the project aspires to be successful’ (idem, p. 39). It is, there-
fore, important to have in place a thorough analysis of such conditions before commencing the programme and monitoring and regular evaluation focused on those conditions. Further, impact does not have to be about systems, it may be more important at a micro level, i.e. at the level of institutions and individuals. The contribution of LdV to the experience in international cooperation and generation and implementation of European-funded projects should not be underestimated. The impact at individual level goes beyond the acquisition of new skills and is evident in its effect on cultural and professional values.

Evaluation and valorisation documents define the programme too broadly, making focused impact evaluation almost impossible. The European Commission, therefore, suggested in-depth training needs analyses and diagnoses as a useful tool for better targeting (European Commission, 2002). A need for a more demand-driven approach is now being discussed on the programme agenda.

As far national evaluation reports are concerned, they contributed to some extent as reference material to the external evaluation of the programme at EU level, to the final report on the first phase of the programme (European Commission, 2000) and to the valorisation strategy (European Commission, 2002). They were widely used for promoting the programme, but not so much for further strategy adjustment and priority formulation. The latter happened as a result of the sequence of evaluation and planning. Discussion of the LdV II and the decision to open the programme took place in 1999 and could not take into account the results of the reports. The first call was prepared at the beginning of 2000, the priorities for which were identified for the period of 2000-02. It partially took into account the national reports prepared in 1999 (17).

Nevertheless, many things needed to be changed and this was confirmed by most evaluation documents. The recommendations were to limit the number of objectives (18), to simplify procedures and to decentralise implementation of the programme, in particular selection procedures and monitoring, and these were subsequently implemented. The methodological deficiencies in evaluation at national level caused difficulties for the overall programme evaluation. A lack of longitudinal studies, control groups and follow-up studies were characteristic of the programme not only in central and eastern Europe but also in the majority of Member States. There are examples of good practice in evaluation and related research that need to be disseminated to other Members States and the evaluation experiences of other EU-funded programmes may provide inspiration. Nevertheless it has been recognised that LdV needs to adopt a more demand-driven approach in evaluation with clear procedures, guidelines and methods for the subsequent phases of the programme.

(17) Results of interviews with National Agencies.
(18) Formulated on the basis of the working group selected by the European Commission and national authorities, apart from the CEECs representatives. The Programme Committee approved the objectives with CEECs representatives as observers only.
3. Summary of findings from evaluation reports

Using the criteria-based analysis (Annex 1) to structure the findings, we present the summary in chronological order according to the major stages of programme/project evaluation.

3.1. Before implementation

If the programme design has weaknesses, for example, a restricted definition of VET, a bottom-up approach to development at the expense of policy level involvement, the absence of effective dissemination mechanisms of results into practice, this will result in implementation failings. The ‘Log-frame’ tool (19), which identifies major opportunities, threats, risks and assumptions, proved very useful. However, in certain cases the method and its structure are too vague to identify major contextual challenges and design an adequate strategy at all levels. The frequent failure to provide indicators in initial documents introduces methodological flaws and is a major problem for measuring progress, monitoring and evaluation. Only a thorough ex-ante evaluation with analysis of main socioeconomic trends, labour-market requirements and institutional settings with a consultation process going in parallel, creates the conditions for consensus on what the programme has to achieve and where the reform process should go. If this condition is not fulfilled, national authorities often do not identify with the results of an international project and therefore do not take them on board for further mainstreaming.

The pilot school approach adopted in some Phare projects is innovative but as they were weakly linked to the policy level, they did not lead to the systemic change that was hoped for. A more systemic and policy oriented design of projects is recommended with pilot schools as an integral part of a larger concept at the heart of future projects.

Project implementation is suboptimal when the involvement of the political level (e.g. Ministry) is minimal. Evaluations have identified this as a major drawback not only of programme implementation but also design. Also the NARIC and the LdV cases show clearly that the new institutions need to be as close to the national ministries and regional political decision-makers as possible, in order to have the mainstreaming impact desired. There is also the continued risk of losing the transnational perspective, which can lead to poorly functioning European and international networks.

3.2. During implementation

As seen in the case studies, the complexity of programmes creates difficulties in identifying appropriate and measurable indicators of achievement. It is essential that the programme design contains effective monitoring and continuing evaluation mechanisms in order to fulfil the formative function for success at policy level.

For successful and smooth implementation it is essential that the programme design takes account of cultural factors and institutional, systemic or personal characteristics of those involved. For example the lack of a tradition of constructive inter-ministerial dialogue and systemic provision for social partner’s involvement are often added flaws in VET reform projects. Reform efforts were especially successful in those countries where the national, regional and local levels had jointly worked to common targets in a complementary top-down and bottom-up approach. Definition of these targets needs major stakeholder involvement at all political levels, from the macro to the micro level, making the whole reform process more transparent.

Dissemination is crucial in making project outputs available to those not involved (other

(19) The logical framework approach, for example: http://www.worldbank.org/evaluation.
stakeholders, wider target group, constituency). Even where dissemination activities and public discussion take place, any lack of receptiveness, interest or acknowledgement of results from the responsible Ministry prevents mainstreaming of programme outputs at national level. Different formats, presentations and mechanisms are essential in reaching stakeholders and the wider audience with information. Systemic dissemination mechanisms incorporated into the initial programme design are helpful for mainstreaming and cascading best practices throughout the project. The difficulty occurs however, in defining best practice and meaningful results prior to final and ex-post (impact) evaluation.

3.3. After the programme

The evaluation exercise is less likely to produce relevant results if the distinction between programme and impact evaluation is unclear. Legal measures and the forming of institutions are crucial in achieving sustainability (institution-building).

There should be a strategy to check the extent to which published results and suggestions from project evaluations are implemented in the target systems later. The term ‘mainstreaming’ of pilot projects means repeating project experience and results in other contexts and making them become policy, backed by appropriate measures.

3.4. The evaluation process

For it to be successful, evaluation needs to be understood as a development process, which aims at capacity and institution building and creates self-evaluation skills among those affected. In many cases evaluation results are only made available to the project partners (partner countries). A process for a more rational dissemination to all Member States should be implemented.

The difference between programme and impact evaluation needs to be stressed again. Impact evaluation requires taking account of the context: political, economic, institutional and social. If not carried out initially in the framework of an ex-ante evaluation, at the end of the programme any impact evaluation has no starting point for analysis.

Evaluation budgets are often too small to research project achievement fully (as a rule, 5% of the budget for small projects and 3% for large programmes should be made available). This aspect is also linked to one of the more time and cost consuming sides of evaluation, the dissemination process of the results. Dissemination is the key activity in provoking interest in and preparing for mainstreaming to non-pilot schools (‘cascading’ via demonstration events or information packages).

Dissemination can support the major aim, sustainability. Sustainability means delivering benefits to the target group over an extended period (visibility, networking, policy consensus, user’s feedback, funding, official recognition, competent staff, human resources commitment, remaining outputs). We therefore consider that the products of evaluation should go beyond the usual workshop/conference and report and a variety of products to address different target groups and stakeholders would increase their learning from the exercise.

3.5. Methodology of assessment

The method is primarily dependent on the case. Not all Phare and other international programmes can be evaluated using one single method. However, there are some common strengths and weaknesses of methodology.

First, ex-ante evaluations may be necessary before the launch of major EU programmes at national level (or feasibility studies enhanced). In certain cases ex-ante evaluation may need to go beyond the assessment of existing priority themes against the socioeconomic context and identify priority themes and measures on the basis of the context analysis.

Second, careful description of indicators is necessary. Time spent on project and indicator design is well spent as it will save resources during implementation prevent difficulties of monitoring or incomplete evaluation. The suggested methods of self-evaluation required by the European Commission from the project promoters are still vague.

Third, evaluation needs to be perceived by all stakeholders as a development process: it should aim above all at capacity and institution building and sustainable self-evaluation skills. It is better to reduce the scope of the evaluation and
complete a whole circle of reforms rather than attempt too much at one time and leave crucial topics incomplete (e.g. number of professions selected; number of pilot schools; etc.).

Continuous monitoring of evaluation progress, substantial commenting on draft and final reports and close attention by the steering group increase the validity and accuracy of the evaluation and its recommendations for the stakeholders. The central State and public administration in central and eastern Europe lacks experience in evaluation practices, methods and mechanisms. Overt manipulation of evaluation input forms, reports and programme documents also takes place, resulting in inaccurate evaluation exercises and findings.

3.6. Involvement of national and international experts

The more that national experts are involved in all stages of the programme, the more transfer of knowledge takes place. This way, the evaluation culture introduced by the Commission can be transferred to the national level. National experts should be involved in all components of the programme. They are the major source for future sustainability, enduring knowledge transfer and capacity-building.

However, the multi-national composition of the evaluation team was helpful in allowing specific requirements of interviewees to be met by selected evaluators. The outside perspective of international evaluators needs to be maintained in order to guarantee national comparative evaluation expertise and to promote the European dimension.

3.7. Evaluation culture

Evaluation abilities need time to develop. It is clear from our cases that the evaluation culture varies strongly across countries. Sometimes evaluation is perceived as a threat, though at others it is welcomed as a form of free consulting.

The translation of evaluation findings into policy often lacks systemic links. Evaluation findings and reports, especially if critical, may be shelved or not disseminated at all.

One positive finding is that the programme and evaluation practices introduced by the EU in candidate countries and Member States caused a major drive to strengthen evaluation culture. The practices were often adopted by the respective States for evaluation of international and national measures and in candidate countries this is a slow but promising process.

3.8. Interrupted chain of responsibilities

Attention needs to be drawn to one aspect which is considered a flaw: the split of responsibilities throughout the programme cycle via a chain of contracts with ‘limited responsibility’. There is no overview of the programme from its inception to final recommendations. Responsibility is shared at all stages necessitating exchanging information, solid monitoring and reporting practices and formats and the assignment of single project directors throughout project duration.

The following identifies all the steps necessary to conceive a Phare traditional programme for a given country.

Clearly, the split of responsibilities at each step results in a lack of overview and control of the whole process. ‘E’ in a circle, in the above scheme, refers to the usual outsourcing of services to external experts. While it is clear that expertise, beyond that available in contracting authorities, is necessary to complete these steps, the danger is that project coherence is lost. The huge number of people involved in conception, design, implementation and evaluation implies a loss of knowledge at each step. In other words, experts contracted to develop terms of reference may not be aware of the priorities and strategies selected by other external experts at the stage of programme conception. This often results in omission, overlap or mismatch between the stages of the programme.

The bigger the programme and the more people involved, the more critical is the need to ensure overview by the project owner. The amendments introduced in the Phare implementation mechanism (with the Decentralised Implementation System [DIS], introduced in 1997) were triggered by the recognition that the Commission, i.e. its single project manager, had often not been able to follow up programme progress in the required detail. This
was due to the high number of projects managed by an individual programme officer, the large budgets attached to each of these projects, the high number of subcontracts (and related production of terms of reference, tender procedures, selection procedures and implementation monitoring. However, maintaining a project overview has also proven difficult for institutions in the recipient countries. Similar problems arise in terms of high staff turn-over, limited human resources and management capacities and expertise to assess the value of activities.

Figure 3: Traditional EU policy cycle
4. Research agenda and recommendations

4.1. Research agenda

In Annex 1 of this study the authors summarise the possible criteria for evaluation. This list is not complete and not every criterion necessarily applies. However the criteria underlines that the aspects to be considered before, during and after a programme for evaluation are wide and diverse. The authors agree with the ETF (Viertel et al., 2004) that there is no single, ready-made toolkit for evaluation and consider that methods and standards need to be developed.

The following issues are considered as priority for further research:

(a) methods for commissioning and negotiating evaluation assignments: which procedure and format is most favourable to comprehensive evaluation?
(b) impact assessment of evaluation exercises in general: how can the adaptation of policies be facilitated by the evaluation?
(c) the difference in impact of different evaluation methods: which methods are more effective in terms of evaluation accuracy and impact?
(d) evaluation dissemination tools and their outreach and impact on stakeholders: which dissemination tools are appropriate for dissemination of evaluation?
(e) evaluation dissemination methods and their outreach and impact on stakeholders and the public: which evaluation methods increase the impact and effectiveness of evaluations?
(f) intercultural communication and their implications for international evaluation exercises: what is the ‘evaluation culture’? Is evaluation an element of some cultures or can cultures of evaluation vary between them? How is the word evaluation understood in different cultures?

4.2. Recommendations

Evaluations are single tasks (or assignments/contracts) but also have to be seen as segments of a bigger process of reform. General acceptance of, or hostility against, evaluations are key factors in increasing or decreasing their use and level of impact. In some cases there were no ex-ante evaluations, in others the evaluation was purely summative and neglected the programme process and the major stakeholders involved.

In order to apply the findings from this analysis, the author team recommends the following approaches for optimal effectiveness of evaluation processes. In addition to the criteria for a complete evaluation cycle, these recommendations might also be used as a checklist before commissioning evaluation assignments.

(a) A process oriented approach
Evaluation as a principle is based on two complementary approaches: justification of expenditure and determination of outcomes and outputs. While both dimensions are important, evaluations should attach primary importance to the latter: evaluation is understood as a development process in which the extent and quality of individual and organisational learning is analysed.

(b) A stakeholder-oriented approach
All implementers, managers, beneficiaries and stakeholders should be involved in the evaluation exercise in order for learning to take place at all levels and among all concerned. Only by motivating people and institutions and engaging them in the evaluation, will the improvements generated by an evaluation take place.

(c) A transnational approach
Different research traditions and diverse disciplinary backgrounds are implicit in international evaluations. Sensitivity to cultural differences, suspicion of evaluators or fear of the evaluation consequences need to be appreciated and addressed accordingly. European evaluators must be aware of the specific requirements of truly ‘European’ research and have considerable experience in such activity.

(d) A policy-oriented approach
Evaluation should not be understood as a purely academic exercise, but should also
aim at partial findings for EU and national/regional (implementation and evaluation) practices in education and training. Rather than looking exclusively at the content and methodology of delivery of education, the relevant experience (successes and failures) and the effectiveness of programme/project activities should also be examined in selected case studies. Evaluation also needs to target policy-makers in terms of format, style and message.

(e) A focused approach
Although possibly contradictory to the above statements about the need to analyse the environment and broader group of stakeholders, any evaluation must define its focus. The evaluation of all and everything is impossible and would result in superficial findings. There should be clearly defined objectives and a clear agreement with the ‘paymaster’ on issues to be investigated. Finally, the general scope of the evaluation ‘justification’ or ‘improvement’ also should be decided. Some of these options exclude others and cannot be used contemporaneously.

(f) A sustainable approach
Evaluation findings and recommendations should be requested and produced in several formats. As with the dissemination of programme results, the distribution of evaluation results to all involved should be obligatory in order to open opportunities for learning at all levels. Evaluation products should cover the whole range of communication and technology available (reports, briefs, electronic mailings, workshops, www-sites, meetings, etc.). The evaluation should aim at the learning educating project implementers, beneficiaries and sponsors and at having a long-lasting impact.

(g) A shared-responsibility approach
Given the frequent interruption of the chain of responsibilities in major policies and programmes, the potential for achieving more coherent project steering with permanent monitoring, overview and responsibility are explored.

It is recommended that the terms of reference are renegotiated with the beneficiaries. Evaluators may yield better results in this exercise. Quality improvement can be achieved through detailed and comprehensive agreement on programme objectives with major stakeholders.

There is a need for detailed and comprehensive agreement on evaluation objectives with all major stakeholders. In all our cases there was no systematic approach to how the participation and involvement of stakeholders was measured. The authors recommend the assignment of one project director to oversee the project and the evaluation to overcome the problem of responsibility in the programme cycle. One person would acquire a thorough knowledge of the project and as the person responsible would be the main point of contact for external evaluators. This person would not, of course, be the only point of contact for the evaluator.

Ex-ante, accompanying and final evaluations need to be exercised by external agents. During the experts meeting at Cedefop in Thessaloniki the independence issue of evaluators was extensively discussed. It was agreed that only the independent outside view of external evaluators can provide critical and objective results for summative evaluations. Exclusive internal evaluation is often not accepted as the results of the evaluation can be seen as too biased.

The evaluator should be present during all steps of project implementation. Quality improvement can only be guaranteed by sufficiently high evaluation budgets. Too low budgets result in superficial evaluation procedures (up to 5 % of project value may be necessary for comprehensive evaluation processes).

4.3. Evaluation as part of implementation
In the context of the Phare cases it became clear that most of the programmes were performed without clear methodology and guidelines for monitoring and evaluations. Monitoring procedures were basically innovated by those in charge of programme management for practical management needs. The procedures were often imperfect and did not keep clear records in accordance with specific monitoring indicators, which normally serve as an important evaluation tools.

Evaluations as such were never an integral part of programme implementation. This has also financial implications, with no budget reserved for
evaluation activities. Over several years, similar programmes were implemented in succession without the appraisal of evaluation results of the previous programme (or its cycle) but this does not mean there were no modifications or improvements from one programme to another. Such processes were intuitive and straightforward, a form of ‘learning by doing’. Only after a number of years and performing an increasing variety of programmes and with emergence of the issue of absorption capacity, did it become clear how important clear indicators and good records were. This was largely influenced by pressure from the European Commission and by linking Phare assistance to structural funds procedures. In line with EU Member States, CEECs slowly started to develop evaluations in accordance with the methodology provided for the structural funds evaluations used also for other programmes, including evaluation of implementation of national policies.

Evaluation culture depends on awareness of the positive aims and the added value of evaluations. This suggests the need for publicity in EU countries and CEECs to stimulate interest among the professional classes. As with many issues, evaluation culture needs broad social backing, not only from the State, public and international authorities but, even more, from the civil society. The establishment of professional associations in the field of evaluation may significantly advance the evaluation culture. Inclusion of various national experts into the European evaluation networks and societies may give added impetus.
## List of abbreviations

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<tr>
<th>Abbreviation</th>
<th>Description</th>
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<tbody>
<tr>
<td>BG</td>
<td>Bulgaria</td>
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<tr>
<td>CEEC</td>
<td>Central and eastern European country</td>
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<td>CZ</td>
<td>Czech Republic</td>
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<td>DG EAC</td>
<td>Directorate General for Education and Culture</td>
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<td>DIS</td>
<td>Decentralised implementation system</td>
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<td>ECTS</td>
<td>European credit transfer system</td>
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<td>ENIC</td>
<td>European network of information centres</td>
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<td>ENQA</td>
<td>European network for quality assurance in higher education</td>
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<td>ETF</td>
<td>European Training Foundation</td>
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<td>LdV</td>
<td>Leonardo da Vinci</td>
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<td>LLL</td>
<td>Lifelong learning</td>
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<td>LTA</td>
<td>Long-term technical assistance</td>
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<td>MoE</td>
<td>Ministry of Education</td>
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<td>NARIC</td>
<td>National academic recognition information centre</td>
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<td>NCVQ</td>
<td>National Council for vocational qualification (UK)</td>
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<td>NTF</td>
<td>National training fund (CZ)</td>
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<td>PMU</td>
<td>Project management unit</td>
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<td>ŠIOV</td>
<td>Štátne inštitúty odborného vzdelávania [State Vocational Education Institute] (SK)</td>
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<td>ŠPU</td>
<td>Štátny pedagogický ústav [National Institute for education] (SK)</td>
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<tr>
<td>SR</td>
<td>Slovak Republic</td>
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<tr>
<td>UVET</td>
<td>Programme component of Bulgarian Phare: upgrading VET</td>
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<tr>
<td>VETERST</td>
<td>Vocational education and training; education; research, science and technology (programme)</td>
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<tr>
<td>VÚPSVR</td>
<td>Výskumný ústav práce, sociálnych vecí a rodiny [Research Institute of labour, social affairs and family] (SK)</td>
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This list of common criteria for VET evaluation was agreed on the basis of a first analysis of the case studies and after discussion with colleagues at the February 2002 Workshop in Thessaloniki.

Clarification of purpose of these criteria:
We looked for criteria that could be applied to structure relevant information gleaned from the evaluation of programmes under our remit. The timescale used to group these criteria may be appropriate for larger evaluation exercises. After considering comments from others involved in the third research report these criteria were applied to our sample of evaluation processes and reports. While we are concerned about impact evaluation we need to take into account the process of evaluation (inc. formative evaluation) if we are to make useful conclusions about evaluating impact and the design of reform programmes.

Before the implementation of the programme
1. Reform setting: what was the setting (political, social, economic, cultural) for the reform? How much attention was given to it when designing the evaluation? How important are these settings likely to be?
2. Reform aims: what was the aim (20) of the reform? What was to change (e.g. learning, institutions, frameworks and certification)? What was to be maintained? Was all this considered for evaluation?
3. Reform actors: who was pressing for change? Who was opposed to it? How did they act? Were they motivated to participate? Why were they successful? Was a stakeholder analysis part of the evaluation?
4. Policy relevance: what was the extent of, and attention to, any explicit link between national economic goals and the reform (e.g. skills needs, workforce development, and partnership)?
5. Policy description: was a description of national policy used to underpin the reform and its evaluation and was it intended to measure impact in terms of this? If there was no policy description what was the point of the evaluation?
6. Policy involvement: was there evidence of policy level involvement? Similarly was there evidence of bottom-up demand for reform? Did evaluation investigate this?
7. User impact: impact needs to be measured by changes in opportunity and practice amongst end users (learners, communities, organisations and countries). Was there evidence that there was sustained focus on increasing opportunity and developing practice amongst end users and how did the evaluation measure it?
8. Donor commitment: is there a declaration of intent and continued commitment from any donor authority? Did the evaluation investigate it?
9. Risk management: what did people see as the risks associated with each reform? What was done to reduce risk? How was risk management organised? Did the evaluation include programme risks?
10. Reform management: who managed the reform (people, agencies)? How well did they do? How did they see the reform? Were all actors considered in the evaluation? Was there evidence of policy level involvement? Similarly was there evidence of bottom-up demand for reform?
11. Legal embedding: is there evidence in the evaluation that, where appropriate, legal arrangements were considered as a preparatory step towards implementing the reform?

(20) Each feature of planned change will need to be broken down to reach the heart of the reform, for example, if improving learning was the aim we will need to look at relevant views of learning, predominant types of learning (formal, informal, non formal), exemplars of desired learning styles.
12. Programme handbook: was there a handbook or manual (or other material) describing the reform? How did any donor institution contribute to this publication? Were the definitions of the fields involved clear? Was the manual evaluated in terms of content?

13. Preparatory studies: were feasibility studies carried out or ex-ante evaluations planned? Did the evaluation look at the quality of these studies?

14. Social partners: was there a plan for full engagement of social partners? Were they involved in the evaluation?

During the implementation phase

15. Dissemination practice: how was the proposed reform publicised? Who discussed it? Did evaluation thematise dissemination throughout programme duration?

16. Management structure: what was the basic structure of the reform (e.g. legal, structural, management, funding)? Did evaluation consider its appropriateness?

17. Stakeholder motivation: how were people and organisations motivated to participate? How was this motivation differentiated and assessed?

18. Stakeholders’ activities: how was the involvement of individuals and key groups monitored? How were they used as indicators of success or failure in programme and the evaluation?

19. Transitional arrangements: were there transitional arrangements in place during the period of reform? How were these introduced, managed and dismantled? Did evaluation consider this? How was the involvement of individuals and key groups monitored? How were they used as indicators of success or failure?

20. Mainstreaming provisions: is there evidence that the pilot phase was useful because it linked strongly to systemic change and was effectively disseminated? Were issues of mainstreaming and sustainability addressed during the expansion phase and did evaluation consider these?

21. Complementary activities: is there evidence of organisations at national, regional and local levels working jointly towards common targets in a complementary top-down and bottom-up approach and were they involved in the evaluation?

After the programme had been completed

22. Programme context: how important was the political, social, economic and cultural influence setting for the success of the reform and how did evaluation cater for it?

23. Programme timing: on what timescale was the reform planned? How did this compare with the outcome according to the evaluation?

24. Programme budget: what did the reform cost? What were the intended costs?

25. EU priorities: how are the EU-wide common themes for VET (such as improving access to VET and raising participation) addressed in the programme and the evaluation?

26. Programme spill-over: is there evidence that the programme and evaluation practices (introduced from the EU) resulted in activity in a Member State and a programme of national action?

27. Monitoring tools: were monitoring and evaluation tools in place to identify, take account of and measure the impact of policy changes during the course of the reform and did evaluation analyse them?

28. Programme flexibility: if an ex-ante evaluation process was in place, did this evaluation take the possible future change of the setting into account?

29. Systemic impact: is there evidence of a systemic link between the outcomes of the reform and policy development and how was it measured?

30. Dissemination phasing: is there evidence and evaluation findings’ that the dissemination process is culminating at a certain point after the beginning at the outset of the activity?

The evaluation process

31. Development process: was there evidence that the evaluation was understood as a
development process aimed at capacity and institution building and creating self-evaluation skills amongst beneficiaries?

32. Evaluation culture: how was the evaluation process perceived by the major stakeholders (EU funders, national government, major actors, social partners and the evaluators themselves)?

33. Evaluation method: was there evidence or suspicion of methodological weaknesses in the evaluation programme, e.g. sampling, instrument design, indicators, time and constraints?

34. Evaluation completeness: is there evidence of the whole process of reform being fully evaluated? Were there shortfalls in evaluation effort in specific phases?

35. Evaluation indicators: Is there evidence of use of quantitative and qualitative indicators being developed for the evaluation process? If there were no indicators (developed through benchmarking and target setting for example), what effect has this had?

36. Evaluation skills: was there evidence of a lack of experience of evaluation practices, methods and mechanisms in any stakeholder organisation?

37. Evaluation censorship: was there any evidence of evaluation findings and reports being shelved or not disseminated?

38. Evaluation budget: what is the size of the evaluation budget in relation to the activity as a whole (as a rule, 5% of budget for small projects and 3% for large programmes should be made available)?

39. Evaluation dissemination: to what extent are evaluation results being made available to the project partners (partner countries) and to all member countries?

40. Reporting formats: was the dissemination material targeted to different audiences as opposed to a one-size-fits-all policy?

Mike Coles (12.3.2002)
Bernd Baumgartl (19.2.2002)
The following criteria-based analyses were carried out and annexed to give the reader additional information for the in-depth study of four cases. They are not intended to be read as complete text, but to provide direct access to certain aspects of a case (according to the criteria in Annex 1) and to enable selective examination of an evaluation.

Case Study 1: evaluation of Phare VET programme CZ 93.05, VET in the Czech Republic

Before the implementation of the programme

1., 2. and 3. – The programme setting, aims and the actors have been described extensively in the textual analysis of Chapter 2 (see Sections 2.2.1. and 2.2.2.).

4. Policy relevance. The objective of the programme was to support the Czech Government in the modernisation of its VET as a key element of economic and social reform. However, the policy framework was missing. The Strategic Review provided valuable analysis and guidance on how the programme can significantly contribute to the reform progress. Sadly, many of the points made in this document are still valid.

5. Policy description. The strategic review of VET provided the strategic framework for the implementation of VET.

6. Policy involvement. Throughout the programme the involvement of the Czech MoE remained minimal. The evaluation points to this as to a major drawback not only of the programme implementation but also of the programme design. The objective of the contribution to the reform of VET did not correspond to the strategy for implementation with its focus on pilot schools and lack of systemic activities. Although the managing unit paid much attention to dissemination activities and public discussion, the lack of receptiveness, interest and acknowledgement of results from the MoE prevented the mainstreaming of outputs to national level. Further, the programme arrangement did not involve third parties from policy level, e.g. the Ministry of Labour, which resulted in the lack of linkage to labour-market restructuring and adult training.

The bottom-up initiative proved more encouraging. There was much interest from pilot schools and cooperation with them was smooth and gratefully received. Unfortunately, the programme provides a mechanism for dissemination of pilot school’s work to other schools.

7. User impact. There is no doubt that the programme improved the quality of the schools and had a major impact on their development. The aforementioned foreign study visits facilitated knowledge transfer and new pedagogical methods, teaching materials and management practices improved efficiency. The evaluation also identified weaknesses in the programme such as the lack of transfer of good practices and programme results to other, non-pilot schools.

8. Donor commitment (see Section 2.2.1.).

9. Risk management. According to the evaluation report, the two concerns anticipated in the Financial memorandum (limited availability of funds, reluctance of pilot schools) were not supported by the evidence. With the risk of lack of government commitment to VET reform, such assumption in the log frame matrix of the Financial memorandum were not apparent and it put the whole programme at risk.

10. Programme management. Responsibility for overall implementation was transferred to the ETF in 1995 under the Convention signed between the Commission and ETF. ETF was charged with supporting the monitoring and implementation of the Financial memorandum.

11. Legal embedding. The new bill of the School Act took into account some of the programme results. It was proposed to Parliament for approval several times but due to
the lack of political consensus each time it was decided to hold the document for further elaboration.

12. Programme handbook. The manual for implementation was a standard Phare manual DIS. For target groups and the wider public a regular newsletter was published and extensively distributed, there was a media campaign and many publications were disseminated and discussed throughout the programme, including the Green Paper and a Policy Paper.

13. Preparatory studies. The aforementioned Strategic Review was the starting analytical document that identified major challenges and priorities. The Review was implemented in the framework of a different programme. The Phare VET programme also conducted a feasibility study and drafted the Strategic Plan.

14. Social partners. The social partners were involved through the Advisory Task Force with an important role in the programme development. Some pilot schools managed to attract interest from social partners at the regional or local level but involvement in the process of curriculum development has generally met with disinterest. This was due to the lack of systemic provision and a lack of interest in cooperation from social partners. The evaluation hardly involved social partners in finding reasons for their lack of interest.

During the implementation phase

15. Dissemination practice. The evaluation sums up the milestones in dissemination activities, including eight thematic reports analysing the experience of pilot schools activities, three synthesis reports, a draft policy paper (Green Paper); all constituting a major publication From pilot schools to reform strategy: outcomes of the Phare programme reform of vocational education and training; a number of international, national and regional conferences and seminars where the findings were widely discussed; the media campaign; a discussion paper Education for prosperity – towards the learning society and others.

16. Management structure. The PMU installed by MoE (1994) did not start the programme effectively resulting in an overall delay and their transfer to the National Training Fund in 1996 (a non-governmental organisation set up by Ministry of Labour and Social Affairs for managing support programmes in the field of HRD).

17. Stakeholder motivation. No clear evidence in the evaluation. Stakeholders were involved through the Advisory Task Force which also benefited from international cooperation and expertise. This arrangement was effective but a larger and more systematic involvement with the MoE and other ministries and social partners did not occur, due to the initial programme setting, responsibility allocation and their lack of commitment.

18. Stakeholders’ activities. No systematic monitoring of key groups took place as this was not a part of the programme design and planning. Therefore, the relevant statistics (e.g. employability of students of pilot schools) was not foreseen. Monitoring occurred at the pilot schools that mainly benefited from the programme. The evaluation did not include measurement of the impact on individuals and target groups.

19. Transitional arrangements. Not considered in the evaluation report apart from the issue of low mainstreaming.

20. Mainstreaming provisions. Some aspects of the programme results can be developed and implemented with support from the European Social Fund. However sustainability of the programme is far from being assured.

21. Complementary activities. The Advisory Task Force had great potential but was disbanded after the programme completion due to lack of funding and support from MoE, despite the participants desire to continue cooperation. The members were interviewed by the evaluators.

After the programme had been completed

22. Programme context. Apart from the issues already mentioned, it is also important to note that MoE suffered from frequent change of ministers and key staff. The MoE largely did not accept the major outputs of the programme. The period was also characterised by the lack of constructive inter-ministerial cooperation and systemic provision for social partner’s involvement.

23. Programme timing. 1994-98: The initial duration was until the end of 1997 but this was extended until 31 December 1998, because of the initial delay in implementation before
the National Training Fund took charge. Also this was to allow the pilot schools to have the full education cycle of four years in order to have comprehensive results for further analysis and recommendation.

24. Programme budget. ECU 4 million. Poor disbursement in the initial phase eventually improved after the transfer of the PMU to the National Training Fund, which resulted in the extension of the disbursement period.

25. EU priorities. The programme was designed to meet the immediate priorities of the Czech Republic during the transition to market economy and labour-market restructuring. However it also contributed to the accession preparation, especially from the perspective of later developments and a more strategy-oriented approach.


27. Monitoring tools. Phare monitoring mechanisms are focused on implementation and management rather than contextual policy development. The instruments for adjustment were not in place. The programme in any case was implemented in such a difficult policy environment that the mere completion of the programme and its valuable outputs demonstrate the success of adjustment in itself. The evaluation report did not scrutinise change management practices.

28. Programme flexibility. No ex-ante evaluation. No specific needs evaluation was undertaken. This is a major drawback of the design of standard Phare programmes but ex-ante evaluations have now become standard in Phare. However, in order to assess the reasons for the delay at the initial programme period, the Centre for foreign assistance initiated the evaluation of the programme, which was performed by BBJ Consult Berlin in 1995. The evaluation (1995) suggested the drafting of a Strategic Plan for the remaining period, appointing a new PMU Director, moving the PMU back to Prague, revising the composition and functioning of the Steering Committee by involving policy-makers, establishing an advisory body and monitoring and evaluating the experience of pilot schools in terms of processes and outputs. These recommendations were implemented at the beginning of 1996.

29. Systemic impact. The programme achievements are largely due to the bottom-up initiatives and receptiveness/readiness to reform at the micro level and among non-governmental organisations and research institutions.

30. Dissemination phasing. The National Training Fund was the main initiator of activities, performed mainly in collaboration with the Research Institute of Technical and Vocational Education and involved the work of both local and foreign experts. Although the activities contributed significantly to public awareness, they did not result in the improvement of policy-level receptiveness and results mainstreaming.

The evaluation process

31. Development process. No evidence is available. It is however important to mention that the evaluation itself was of a fairly formal nature, corresponding to the standard Phare evaluation guidelines. It did not measure impact, nor did it perform any follow up study at the target group level. Although extensive interviewing took place, the evaluation team did not research the pitfalls of accepting the content-related outcomes of the programme. There is little evidence of understanding of the value of product elaborated within the programme no verification of meeting needs in the context of development and strategy. The feedback that such evaluation could bring was therefore limited, in spite of general understanding of major problems of the programme setting and implementation.

32. Evaluation culture. No information is available on the point. In general Phare evaluations were considered as a threat more than as a consulting tool. Phare arrangements for evaluations rely on contracting out to international consortia. Although these involve some local experts in the evaluation, Phare generally did not contribute significantly to the development of the evaluation culture in the country, nor did it enhance expert capacities in evaluations. Evaluation arrangements are decided within the Phare programme bureaucracy, instead of being made the responsibility of managing structures and policy-makers. Evaluations are therefore perceived as imposed externally and
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naturally not seen as a constructive tool for policy planning and adjustment.

33. Evaluation method (see Section 2.2.1).
34. Evaluation completeness. All components of the programme were evaluated.
35. Evaluation indicators. The evaluation report often refers to the lack of measurement of the programme impact and lack of relevant statistics. While it is an important issue, this was not foreseen in the programme. It is however unclear why a serious attempt at impact measurement was not foreseen in the evaluation action itself.
36. Evaluation skills. The contract was assigned to the OMAS Consortium of the Middle Region. Further information is not available. The failure to measure impact with indicators suggests a limited use of evaluation tools.
37. Evaluation censorship. The recommendations produced by the evaluation have not been taken into account by key personnel to any significant extent.
38. Evaluation budget. No information is provided in the evaluation report.
39. Evaluation dissemination. It was made available to appropriate stakeholders in the programme.
40. Reporting formats. No evidence.

Case study 2: evaluation of Phare VET programme SR 94.03, VET reform in the Slovak Republic

Before the implementation of the programme
1. Programme setting. Programme SR 94.03 was a direct continuation of the VET component of the previous Phare programme Labour force market restructuring, T 91.08, designed when Slovakia was still a part of Czechoslovakia. This earlier programme had produced a general strategy for VET reform (Executive study by Birks Sinclair in 1993) and had culminated in the development of new curricula for first grade classes in 20 pilot schools, covering eight professional branches.
2. Programme aims (see Section 2.3.2.).
3. Programme stakeholders. The start-up documentation very clearly identifies those to be involved in the project: the MoE, the Pilot Schools, educational research institutions such as the ŠPU, later to be replaced by the ŠIOV, regional inspectorates, social partners and the Ministry of Labour, Social Affairs and Family. The role of the PMU and the LTA, as fixed in the terms of reference, was to provide the necessary management following the DIS and to prepare and assist all involved in reaching the objectives of the different subprojects. Key components of the implementation were contracted by the PMU to the consultants BBJ (Germany) and Birks Sinclair (England). The Financial memorandum for Phare programme SR 94.03 had been signed by a government that went out of office a few weeks later. The new government was not opposed to the programme but was not interested or supportive either. Its success was in the main achieved through the individual effort and enthusiasm of committed teachers and school managers.
4. Policy relevance. The objective of the programme was to support the Slovak Government in the modernisation of VET as a key element of economic and social reform.
5. Policy description. The basic documents of the programme, the Financial memorandum and terms of reference for the LTA, had been produced within a feasibility study carried out by Dutch consultants, Hobbeon and special bridging technical assistance was provided by the European Commission. The 1993 recommendations of the executive study had been adopted by the Slovak government as policy guidelines. The following key components of the programme were agreed upon:
(a) curriculum development in selected job families (mechanical engineering, clothing/textiles, food processing, gardening, electrical engineering, construction, economy/commercial service and transport);
(b) teacher training in order to facilitate the implementation of these new curricula;
(c) provision of learning equipment for pilot schools;
(d) establishment of partnerships with vocational schools in the EU;
(e) development of a national strategy for VET and dissemination of programme results.
6. Policy involvement. Throughout the programme the involvement of the Slovak MoE
remained minimal; no initiatives were being taken by the Steering Committee; frameworks for curriculum implementation and dissemination of the products of the Phare programme SR 94.03 were implemented only reluctantly and were fraught with restrictions. The completion of the programme and the successful developments for Slovak VET within the programme were secured by an enormous input of work and time by dedicated individuals within the management structure rather than by effective management and implementation procedures.

7. User impact. The investment made in the 20 schools heralded a new era in their life, exposing them to new pedagogical and technical practices and initiating a healthy desire for improvement, effectiveness and efficiency. Although not always supported from the programme management, the schools mobilised the competence of staff to take initiatives of their own. The status of the schools also received a boost in their regions. They now have privileged contacts with social partners in their sector, have experience in international networking and are more aware of their potential role in the key issue of regional development. Some pilot schools expressed their intention to become fully-fledged regional knowledge centres for participation in future EU programmes.

It is at the pilot school, teacher and student levels that the programme has achieved its impact. In their view, teaching and learning has changed its concept opening people’s eyes to alternative methods and is a process which is irreversible.

8. Donor commitment. The programme was part of the EU Phare programme which indicates a principal and substantial political priority from the donor. It is also conditional that an agreement of the government to the projects exists. However, at the implementation level, the monitoring and support by the EU delegation was suboptimal. This was partly due to under-staffing but also partly due to mismanagement, which had serious consequences some years later.

9. Risk management. A formal risk assessment was part of the planning documents but it did not cover all possible risks (especially political risks), neither did the programming address the risks identified.

10. Programme management. The role of the PMU and the LTA, as fixed in the terms of reference, was to provide the necessary management following the DIS and to prepare and assist all involved in reaching the objectives of the different subprojects. Key components of the implementation were contracted by the PMU to the consultants BBJ (Germany) and Birks Sinclair (England). Both consultant and local coordinator underperformed. Throughout the programme the involvement of the Slovak MoE remained minimal; no initiatives were being taken by the Steering Committee; frameworks for curriculum implementation and dissemination of the products of the Phare programme SR 94.03 were implemented only reluctantly and were fraught with restrictions. The completion of the programme and the successful developments for Slovak VET within the programme were secured by an enormous input of work and time by dedicated individuals within the management structure rather than by effective management and implementation procedures. In spite of some remarkable successes, the different subprogrammes did not manage to produce coherent and equally acceptable results. Results remained largely limited to pilot school level.

11. Legal embedding. No evidence of legal arrangements except for a centre which in future could act as a central clearing agency for VET reform (ŠIOV). In respect of the development of a VET reform strategy for Slovakia the programme has, at best, laid the groundwork but the concrete work still remains to be done. There were only clear statements of the new Minister that recommendations were to be followed and legal changes would be made, as indicated by the evaluators, at programme end.


13. Preparatory studies. A feasibility study was carried out by the Dutch consultants, Hobbeon. The 1993 recommendations of the executive study had been adopted by the
Slovak government as policy guidelines. Some time had elapsed until the programme inception and the objectives were partly outdated by that time.

14. Social partners. The efforts to interest social partners and major policy-makers such as the Ministry of Labour in VET reform have largely remained unsuccessful. Some pilot schools managed to raise some, if short-lived interest from social partners at the regional or local level but involvement in the process of curriculum development has in general met with disinterest. Most of these organisational bodies are at present in a stato nascendi and finding competent consultants or staff for VET ranks low in their priorities. Although the pilot schools have, by comparison with other EU countries, discovered the importance of social partners, they were only able to establish sustained working relations with local firms and craftsmen's guilds at best.

During the implementation phase
15. Dissemination practice. The failure to provide for the necessary legal framework for the horizontal mode of dissemination through pilot schools has resulted in fully equipped pilot schools not being allowed to fulfil their role, thus rendering this potentially powerful tool of dissemination useless to the aims of VET reform. ŠIOV stepped in with a traditional, but inadequate, top-down model of dissemination through publications and conferences. Since the application of educational products of the other programme components was restricted to pilot schools only, this exercise remained largely ineffective. The development of a national VET reform strategy was touched upon during the final conference by two leading experts but its realisation remains a task for the future.

16. Management structure. In contrast to the Financial memorandum, the PMU was permanently under-staffed, too under-paid to attract highly qualified managers and under-valued in terms of the status of the project authorising officer, who in other programmes, was at Head of Section or State Secretary level. The curricula for the first grade had been drawn up by members of the ŠPU, who had also designed Phare programme SR 94.03 under the auspices of the Ministry of Labour, where the PMU for Phare programmes T 91.08 was situated. Development of curricula started at school level, under the guidance of ŠPU but was troubled by financial problems of ŠPU and disagreements with pilot schools. At this stage a major change occurred which was to influence the further development of programme SR 94.03 and later threaten to destroy it altogether. In January 1996 the competences for vocational education were moved from ŠPU, where they had been for over 40 years, to the ŠIOV, a new institution created several years earlier and which, at that time, had lacked the capacity for this task. ŠPU was no longer involved. The formal competence for Phare programme SR 94.03 rested solely with the MoE, where the PMU for the programme had also been set up. In 1996 the programme had virtually come to a standstill. There was no working PMU at the MoE and ŠIOV, as the institution responsible for vocational training, had not been contracted by the MoE for Phare programme SR 94.03. By 30 September 1996, a year before expiry, only 27 % of the ECU 4 million allocated to the programme had been contracted and only 10 % had actually been disbursed. Severe disagreements between the Slovak MoE and the EU authorities over another Phare programme aggravated the situation, which was not helped by the rapid succession of different programme managers at the ETF. Teachers and school administrators at school level were left with the task of developing the new curricula. At this point a new procedure was negotiated by the LTA with the parties concerned and new heads of PMU and the Steering Committee installed in the MoE in October 1996. In December a new Work programme (WP3) was negotiated with the ETF. In March 1997 ŠIOV was contracted to the programme and started to coordinate national working groups to secure the implementation of all subprogrammes. This was the turning point for the project. Two core sections of the programme, curriculum development and technical upgrading of pilot schools, were immediately taken over by ŠIOV and the national working groups respectively and the final success and impact of these subprogrammes...
is largely due to the dedication of the responsible experts.
The improved cooperation between the new steering committee, the PMU, ŠIOV, the LTA, the programme manager of the European Commission delegation and the ETF programme manager, resulted in an unparalleled acceleration of contracting and disbursement. By 30 September 1997, 99.9 % of the total amount of ECU 4 million had been contracted. To compensate for the earlier delays, all missing components of the different subprogrammes were now brought into operation together, often with adverse effects.

17. Stakeholder motivation. Pilot Schools were the main beneficiaries, being the main participants in this programme. In the earlier phases of the programme they were not encouraged to work, were impeded or unsupported or were unpaid for it.

18. Stakeholders’ activities. No systematic monitoring took place except of evaluation sheets after training sessions.

19. Transitional arrangements. The lack of monitoring and evaluation instruments has impeded self-assessment and reengineering of the content of the programme. Initiatives almost only ever took place if in the interest of individual parties.

20. Mainstreaming provisions. Pilot schools gained competences, expertise and responsibility as a result of the programme, as did the VET Institute ŠIOV. The extension of results to the national system has not yet been initiated by the responsible authorities.
The investment made in ŠIOV is too great for the MoE not to continue to use the capacity that should exist there to carry out additional VET reform.

21. Complementary activities. Empowerment and expertise provides pilot schools with the potential to become regional knowledge centres, key-players in regional development and recipients for EU-financed programmes. However, there was little involvement for external parties.

After the programme had been completed

22. Programme context. See textual analysis.

23. Programme timing. 1994-98: the deadline for commitments was 30 September 1997, the implementation period finished on 30 September 1998. Despite delays and difficulties the programme was completed in time.

24. Programme budget. By 30 September 1996, a year before expiry, only 27 % of the ECU 4 million allocated to the programme had been contracted and only 10 % had actually been disbursed. By 30 September 1997, 99.9 % of the total amount of ECU 4 million had been contracted. The correctness of financial procedures was certified by an independent final audit.

25. EU priorities. The programme served as a means of allowing continuing reform in a difficult and volatile environment. Its completion at the start of the present government is a guarantee that none of its various products will be lost. The results of the programme have prepared the ground for a more labour-market oriented restructuring of Slovak VET, addressing the key issues of integration of schools and rationalisation of the school system. Innovation in VET is also mentioned as one of the priorities of the Accession Partnership and the Slovak intention to join the EU. A follow-up programme to valorise the investment in selected pilot schools at the national VET level is crucial.


27. Monitoring tools. No systematic monitoring took place, little transparent documentation is available and no control or supervision, from those responsible procedurally or politically, took place. Initiatives almost only ever took place if in the interest of individual parties. The lack of monitoring and evaluation instruments has impeded self-assessment and reengineering of the content of the programme and eventually the evaluation task was hampered by the non-existence of planning instruments, a clear and logical framework (matrix), performance indicators or achievement targets.

According to the Financial memorandum, Article 2.5: Dissemination of Results, the MoE, together with the Steering Committee, was to monitor and evaluate the projects and be responsible for the dissemination of the experience from the reform projects and discussions about future developments. Further, the results of the curriculum development component were to be published

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together with the strategic outline for the future development of vocational education. However, the programme was carried out and finalised without the above occurring. Throughout the implementation period 1994-98 the main parties, as defined in the Financial Memorandum, changed both in institutional terms and function. The Ministry designated a person to chair the steering committee and provided the necessary logistical support to the programme. It was not so involved in monitoring and evaluating the components of the programme, as defined in the Financial Memorandum. Little or no information could be obtained as to minutes or documentation of decisions taken of regular meetings of the steering committee, the advisory task force, the national experts responsible for work of the national working groups, the five national working groups nor of the meetings with all the headmasters of the pilot schools or meetings of members/coordinators of the national experts group and/or national working groups with the respective school coordinators. There are two final reports, one prepared by the LTA the other by experts contracted by PMU. Neither was discussed and approved by the steering committee of the programme. Staff changes within institutions occurred during the project which sometimes were aimed at transferring responsibilities but without regard to experience, expertise or even funding (the shift in 1996 from ŠPU to ŠIOV). The MoE and the management team had not used authority of the DIS to prolong the programme and for the last two years it became largely a technical exercise.

28. Programme flexibility. No ex-ante evaluation. An interim evaluation was carried out but except for the school level, it was unsuccessful in turning the project around due to political barriers.

29. Systemic impact. See textual analysis (programme assessment).

30. Dissemination phasing. See textual analysis (Results and impact).

The evaluation process

31. Development process. Great importance was attached to the evaluation process proceeding in an inter-active way, assigning a significant role to the available central and eastern European and Slovak expertise, thereby hoping to stimulate an intensive national discussion on the Phare VET programme and its value for future VET policy-making. Also a number of recommendations for the future were made.

32. Evaluation culture. Slovak expertise came from various people involved in the project, i.e. representatives of the MoE, the PMU, VET teachers and administrators from pilot schools, specialists from ŠIOV and independent national external experts who could provide an objective view on the project notably from the Slovak Academy of Science, from the VÚPSVR, the ŠPU and the Phare coordinator from the Slovak Government office. The Slovak national observatory on VET and labour market helped with management issues and logistics in Slovakia and was responsible for the organisation of the Programme review conference that took place on 5 and 6 February 1999. Evaluation was definitely and perhaps with reason perceived as a threat by part of the project management.

33. Evaluation method (see Section 2.3.2.).

34. Evaluation completeness. All components of the programme: curriculum development, teacher training, equipment and learning materials, EU-partnership and study visits and development of national strategy and dissemination were considered, evaluated and recommendation made.

35. Evaluation indicators. The evaluation process was based on the analysis of the following source materials:

(a) the central monitoring documents of the Phare programme;
(b) the mid-term evaluation of 1997;
(c) final reports of PMU and LTA;
(d) reports produced within the programme;
(e) analysis of the programme documentation at the ŠIOV;
(f) visits to pilot schools by the evaluation team;
(g) workshop reports of the Programme review conference held on 5 and 6 February 1999;
(h) analysis of questionnaires for pilot-school members and non-pilot school teachers;
(i) inputs by independent Slovak educational experts.

36. Evaluation skills. The composition of the evaluation team was international, inter-disciplinary and wide-ranged. It included experts from the Irish organisation Farrell, Wegimont and Associates, who had already carried out the mid-term evaluation of curricula of this Phare programme in 1997, an experienced evaluator from the Netherlands, an Austrian educational researcher specialised in central and eastern Europe, a VET reform analyst and a PMU deputy Director of the VET Phare programme in Bulgaria. Slovak members of the evaluation team came from the Vocational Information Resource Centre in the VÚPSVR and the Sociological Research Institute ‘Focus’.

37. Evaluation censorship. The evaluators were not allowed to send the report to stakeholders or project participants and it looked as though the report had been shelved. Two years after the evaluation an OMAS team investigating fraud uncovered this report and used it in their work.

38. Evaluation budget. EUR 49 000 for a programme of ECU 3 million, hence too limited a budget.


40. Reporting formats. The format of the report envisaged targeted recommendations at different levels of participation and they were delivered orally.

Case study 3: evaluation of Phare VET programme BG 96.04 upgrading VET in Bulgaria within vocational education and training; education; research, science and technology (VETERST)

Before the implementation of the programme
1. Programme setting. See introduction of textual analysis.
2. Programme aims (see Section 2.4.2.).
3. Programme actors. The start-up documentation clearly identifies the institutions and the main parties to be involved in the project: the Ministry of Education, Science and Technology, the national Working groups composed of Ministry officials and representatives from pilot schools, pilot school teachers and administration, regional Inspectorates, social partners and the Ministry of Labour and Social Policy. The role of the PMU and the LTA, as fixed in the terms of reference was to provide the necessary management following the DIS and to prepare and assist all those involved in reaching the objectives of the different subprojects.

4. Policy relevance. The objective of the programme was to support the Bulgarian Government in the modernisation of its education and training system as a key element of economic and social reform and to ensure the availability of national human resources for economic and social re-structuring.

5. Policy description. Programme BG 95.06 was a direct continuation of the VET component of the previous Phare programme BG 93.14-02 (Post-secondary vocational training project). This earlier programme had produced a general strategy for upgrading VET and had developed relevant practice and expertise.

6. Policy involvement. A government that was soon to go out of office had signed the Financial memorandum for Phare programme BG 95.06. The programme was kept on course, despite frequent government changes at the outset, by the LTA and PMU and since May 1997 the permanent programme authorising officer and dedicated officials in the Ministry’s VET Department.

7. User impact. The programme in question has been designed and implemented on the assumption that the ‘pilot’ and ‘feasibility’ approach would lead to an effective implementation and mainstreaming of results at national level. As in UVET, a mainstreaming of the whole programme throughout the Bulgarian education, training and Science and Technology systems beyond the 30-odd pilot schools could be set in motion through a system of dissemination, new curricula, modules, teacher training methods and methodological expertise. It is perhaps at the level of pilot schools, administrative staff, teachers and students
that the programme has achieved its strongest impact. In their view, teaching and learning has changed its concept and opened people’s eyes to alternative methods and is a process which is irreversible.

8. Donor commitment. The programme was part of the EU Phare programme which indicates a principal and substantial political priority from the donor. It is also conditional that an agreement of the government to the projects exists.

9. Risk management. A formal risk assessment was part of the planning documents but it did not cover all possible risks (especially political risks), nor did the programming address the risks identified.

10. Programme management. The role of the PMU and the LTA, as fixed in the terms of reference, was to provide the necessary management following the DIS and to prepare and assist all those involved, in reaching the objectives of the different subprojects.

Most programme activities proceeded according to the Work programmes. However the UVET programme only completed work on 18 professions instead of the planned 20/25. Dedicated managers and school staff achieved the completion of the programme. All but one of the Teacher career path centres failed to achieve sustainability and the technological unit in Kostimbrod failed. The limited dissemination and mainstreaming of pilot curricula to non-pilot classes and to non-pilot schools was due to the problem of the Teacher Career Path and this is a reflection of the wider structural issues in teacher training.

11. Legal embedding. The new VET law was envisaged to be in place during the programme but it failed to be passed by parliament. It was, however, adopted soon after project end.

12. Programme handbook. No evidence. The EU/Phare has its own manuals for implementation of programmes in general.

13. Preparatory studies. An EU expert group had written a feasibility study but it was outdated at programme inception.

14. Social partners. Efforts to involve national social partners and major policy-makers such as the Ministry of Labour in VET reform have so far been unsuccessful. It is at the local level in many municipalities and communities that this relationship works. However the result of this participation exercise has had positive results. Even if not effective, both social partners and governments have become more familiar with the concept and the social partners understand their potential role in the development and implementation of VET policy. Education, especially continuing, training, is a field where social partners in the EU are taking a leading role and greater interest.

During the implementation phase

15. Dissemination practice. In general, dissemination activities as far as they were executed during the programme have not yet led to a permanent mechanism for circulating and exchanging information. There is a role here for the institutions set up under the programme, which are well equipped to take over this task (see also Section 2.4.2.).

16. Management structure. The programme documents envisaged the establishment of a steering committee to make strategic decisions on the implementation of the programme. The composition of the steering committee, as described in the Financial Memorandum, comprises representatives of the Ministry of Education and Sports, Ministry of Labour and Social Policy, Ministry of Economy and social partner organisations. It proved difficult to set up the Steering Committee, it was a new idea in Bulgaria and took until 1998 to achieve, a considerable delay. A suggested committee structure was provided by the ETF but greater pressure from the EU delegation could have helped speed the process. Initially there were 46 proposals for membership of the Steering Committee that were reduced to 18 for practicality. This committee was the first time groups such as employers, teachers unions and ministries had come together in one forum. After the second meeting their role was more fully understood and interest was taken in the functioning of the programme, checking the results of working groups. Some cooperation of this kind also spread to pilot areas.

Notwithstanding the sharp learning curve and the occasional lack of transparency in deci-
sions on procurement, the largely successful implementation is due to the combined management ability of the PMU, predominantly competent consultants and the management style of the programme manager at ETF. The PMU has been a valuable training platform for a number of enthusiastic young Bulgarian managers and staff, who developed significant competence in EU programmes and procedures. This resulted in the creation of such new institutions as the human resources development centre and the LdV and Socrates office, thus successfully contributing to the improvement of Bulgarian education management. However, while supportive to the programme, policy-making and mainstreaming of pilot results has so far been less successful and not all components were executed as well as envisaged.

17. Stakeholder motivation. A continuing problem in Phare activities is the inability to pay State employees with project money. Consequently teachers and administrators can only rely on their salaries. While this may be justifiable in the EU, low teachers’ salaries often do not provide enough incentive for the additional work generated by a programme. The award of diplomas does attempt to provide an incentive but the failure to recognise teacher training as a means of career progression was criticised by the evaluators.

18. Stakeholders’ activities. As mentioned, the PMU took over substantial project monitoring and evaluation activities. The management of this project was successful in these respects.

19. Transitional arrangements. The evaluators attached much importance to the lack of transitional provisions and provided detailed recommendations to the responsible parties on how to address this need.

20. Mainstreaming provisions. The absence of a legal framework for mainstreaming the experience of pilot schools inhibited dissemination. Apart from information packages for non-pilot schools in UVET, the top-down dissemination strategy adopted by the consultants did not help this situation and the opportunity to provide support for this process through the Regional Inspectorates was not fully used. Moreover, the financial crisis after the programme resulted in less attention from the Ministry of Education and Sports. The impact of the programme activities on key stakeholders was further weakened by changes of some of those involved, for example trained administrators, experts or teachers were substituted or moved to other better paid jobs. The new VET Law, although drafted with suboptimal input by the Ministry of Labour and Social Policy and the new NAVET agency provide concrete opportunities for the future.

21. Complementary activities. As a result of the programme, three teacher training centres, three foreign language centres, a national technology information centre and an information management centre emerged. Expertise was passed from the PMU to the emerging and sustainable human resources development centre, the Socrates office, LdV and other European integration facilities, thus successfully contributing to the capacity and institution-building in Bulgarian education management.

After the programme had reached maturity, been completed or was terminated

22. Programme context (see Section 2.4.1.).

23. Programme timing. The programme lasted from 26 June 1996 until September 1999. After difficulties during the Work programme (WP1) and repeated delays in the first stage of the delivery of equipment, by 1997 the programme proceeded well on schedule. The cooperation between the PMU, the national working groups, the LTA and the programme managers of the EU at the European Commission delegation and at ETF, although not completely free from friction, compensated for the delayed set-up of the Steering Committee (mid 1998) and resulted in a smooth procurement and expenditure.

24. Programme budget. At the end of the disbursement period, 99.99 % of the total amount of ECU 9 million had been spent. A few subprogrammes needed an extension of six to nine months to finalise disbursement (UVET, foreign language training, financial management for school education and the higher education evaluation and accreditation agency).

25. EU priorities. At the end of VETERST Bulgaria already has 60 % of the acquis communautaire in the education field. As a result Bulgaria was beginning accession negotiations with Brussels in the field of education.
Collaboration with foreign experts will naturally continue and, as happens in the EU, has shifted from a ‘foreign expert-recipient’ relation to a partnership of colleagues at peer level. All these are features of a vibrant and flexible system of continuous adaption of the education system to a changing market environment. Whilst Bulgaria has not succeeded in establishing a ready and definitive system, this is not a failure as it was an impossible goal to start with.

26. Programme spill-over. In terms of individual learning and organisations involved in the programme, many results could be observed. The systemic learning at Ministry level was limited. Some dissemination conferences were attended by experts from neighbouring countries (Macedonia, Romania, etc.).

27. Monitoring tools. As required, regular reporting was undertaken and made available to the evaluators who acquired much of their first understanding on this comprehensive information.

28. Programme flexibility. No ex-ante evaluation had been carried out, instead a feasibility study was carried out (see above).

29. Systemic impact. Vocational training is linked to the labour-market survey. The Deputy Minister for Education and Sports, Mr Panchev, wrote to regional inspectors asking for information on employment. There will be a national information system. All schools will be asked for information at the beginning of the next school year about which students obtained jobs. This survey was implemented together with the National Statistical Institute and local structures of the Ministry of Labour and Social Policy, the regional employment councils. Previously, the Ministry of Education and Sports would tell schools how many places and in what subject were required but now schools make proposals to the regional Inspectorates for their future provision. Moreover, each of Bulgaria’s 28 districts has a development plan. Schools negotiate on this basis with local government and employers. Depending on demand for places the school approaches the Ministry of Education and Sports for funds. Experts from regional Inspectorates check with local employment offices whether estimates of vocational schools about demand are correct. A clear demonstration of success is that 80% of graduates have found a job or started their own business. Vocational schools now have passports but they still need to be a restructured. It is planned to reduce the existing 482 schools (plus 75 classes in general secondary schools) to 478 but closing schools has impact on local employment.

The Ministry of Education and Sports considers that there is now joint responsibility with the Ministry of Labour and Social Policy for vocational training. The Ministry of Labour and Social Policy however, paints a picture of non-consultation and the removal of social partners from vocational training bodies as a result of Ministry of Education and Sports prepared legislation. However the Ministry of Labour and Social Policy has had long term experience of working and consulting with social partners. At the programme valorisation conference project authorising officer Totomanova, for programme BG 95.06, characterised the situation as ‘the relationship with the social partners has moved forward’, which is a fair judgement.

30. Dissemination phasing. It is apparent from all interviews outside the capital that schools, inspectorates and higher education institutions feel that they receive insufficient information and demand more. The evaluators feel that the Ministry should include dissemination in the task list of these and the Regional Inspectorates. To begin with, however, most information must leave the Ministry itself in a transparent way.

The evaluation process

31. Development process. Great importance was attached to the evaluation process proceeding in an inter-active way, assigning a significant role to the available central and eastern European and Bulgarian expertise, thereby hoping to stimulate an intensive national debate on the Phare VET programme and its value for future VET policy-making. Also a number of recommendations for the future were made.

32. Evaluation culture. The people involved in the programme were receptive to the idea of evaluation. Schools sometimes confused the evaluators with ‘inspectors’. Critical remarks were,
however, met with resistance. The Programme review conference on 14 February 2000 brought together for the last time all the main parties involved and helped to test the initial findings and theories of the evaluators. It also resulted in a public commitment by the MoE to implement the evaluation team’s immediate and urgent recommendations.

33. Evaluation method. As an inherent feature of the programme design, the evaluation struggled with the difficulty of measuring seven diverse subprojects with one common approach. However, a variety of tools was used to understand project achievements and impacts.

34. Evaluation completeness. All components of the programme were evaluated: UVET, teacher career paths, foreign language training, financial management for school education, development of science and technology, school drop-out in general education, a higher education evaluation and accreditation agency, a science park feasibility study and the PMU.

35. Evaluation indicators. The evaluation process was based on the analysis of the following source materials:
(a) the central monitoring documents of the Phare programme;
(b) the intermediate assessment of OMAS (as part of a general assessment of all Phare activities);
(c) final reports of PMU and Consultants for all subprogrammes;
(d) reports produced within the programme;
(e) analysis of the programme documentation at the PMU and pilot schools;
(f) interviews at and visits to the Ministries of Education and Labour, pilot schools, regional authorities and institutions set up during the programme by the evaluation team;
(g) the work groups reports of the Programme valorisation meeting on 14 February 2000;
(h) analysis of questionnaires for programme recipients;
(i) inputs by independent Bulgarian educational experts.

36. Evaluation skills. The composition of the evaluation team was international, inter-disciplinary and wide-ranging. Bulgarian members of the evaluation team came from the New Bulgarian University, from the Economic University and the National Institute of Education. The team also included the Austrian evaluator of the Slovak Phare VET programme, an experienced VET university teacher and an evaluator from the UK, a VET reform analyst from Sweden and a British NGO Director resident in Bulgaria while implementing other EU programmes in Bulgaria.

Further Bulgarian expertise came from people involved in the project, i.e. representatives of the Ministry of Education and Sports, the PMU, VET teachers and administrators from pilot schools, specialists from research institutes and independent national external experts who could provide an objective view on the project, notably from the Bulgarian Academy of Science, from the National Employment Institute and the National Institute of Education. As detailed in the contract with the ETF, the Bulgarian national observatory on VET and labour market (which had now become a part of the human resources development centre) helped with organisational issues and logistics in Bulgaria and was responsible for the organisation of the ‘Programme valorisation meeting’ which took place on 14 February 2000 in Sofia.

37. Evaluation censorship. No signs of censorship, only the comments on the failed project component in the technological unit were not well received by everyone. However, the evaluation results were made public.

38. Evaluation budget. EUR 49 000 out of EUR 9 million, therefore a small allocation (although one third of budget was simply for procurement).

39. Evaluation dissemination. Substantial dissemination products were produced by the PMU and meetings were held to share project experiences. While some programme components are bound to stay as institutions or national policies, sustainability of some subprogrammes is far from guaranteed. If no additional donor support steps in, it will depend exclusively on the decisions actions, of the MoE whether some products can and will be used further. Public statements by the Minister and his Deputies are encouraging but; the prospect of concrete measures and funding for implementation of mainstreaming is still bleak.
40. Reporting formats. One final workshop and one report were requested as evaluation products.

Case study 4: transnational analysis of NARIC. External evaluation of the NARIC network

Before the implementation of the programme
1. Programme setting (see Sections 2.5.1 and 2.5.2.).
2. Programme aims (see Sections 2.5.1 and 2.5.2.).
3. Programme actors (see Sections 2.5.1 and 2.5.2.).
4. Policy relevance. The national centres are designated by the participating countries. They are responsible for providing institutions and the public with information about higher education qualifications, with a view to facilitating the recognition of such qualifications in participating countries for academic and, in many cases, economic purposes. A strong transnational dimension with the focus on foreign education systems and qualifications has shown a remarkable stimulus for the economy. National institutions have clearly recognised this factor.
5. Policy description (see Chapter 2).
6. Policy involvement. Policy analysis results are only appreciable from a qualitative perspective for the ‘other’ areas included by some of the respondents, because of the small number of answers. The following indicators emerge from the crossed analysis of the resulting tables:
   (a) academic recognition is the area of major interest to governments and other policy-makers;
   (b) professional recognition is the second area of major interest to governments and other policy-makers;
   (c) VET is an area where fewer recognition centres are active because of their mandate;
   (d) informal qualification is an area where the number of recognition centres active is almost identical to professional recognition.

There are signs of interest of national governments and other policy-makers in other areas. In general, frequency of contacts and interest tend to coincide, which can also be regarded as an indicator of the acknowledgement of the role played by recognition centres in these areas.

7. User impact (see Chapter 2).
8. Donor commitment. Although the situation varies from country to country, recognition centres are mainly, largely or completely financed by their national administrations. Since its proposal for the establishment of the network, the Commission made clear that costs for staffing and running of the information centres were to be charged ‘against national budgets, where such units do not already exist’.

The European Commission finances some project activities carried out by the recognition centres with a yearly budget of its Socrates II (previously, Socrates; previously Erasmus) programme. Funds, which are managed by DG EAC/A2, are granted to single recognition centres or, more rarely, to groups of them on a competitive basis.

According to the definitions developed in the second report on the reform of the Commission from 1999, these funds are to be considered as subsidies (or grants).

9. Risk management. The study points out in one of its recommendations that there is the risk of neglecting the European dimension of the network. More visibility and dissemination of materials and exchange of lecturers could reduce the tendency of duplicating activities, abuse or ignoring budget limits.

10. Programme management. The management level was analysed from a sustainability perspective: the establishment year of the present management of the recognition centres has been observed against the mother organisation’s seniority of experience in academic recognition for each different nation. The large majority of their mother organisations practiced academic recognition well before the appointment of the present recognition centres.

For guaranteed future quality management an interesting remark was made in one answers of the textual questionnaires: ‘I would like to introduce a yearly (or 2-yearly) recognition procedure test, which will lead to official
NARIC network practical recommendations concerning the process of credential evaluation aiming at abolishing the existing bureaucratic barriers for mobility in the Member States. The test comprises submitting the same 5-10 (fake and hidden) recognition requests to each NARIC. It will detect the shortfalls in management and administration by checking the occurrence of “good practice” measures.’

11. Legal embedding. The legal framework of NARIC has been described extensively in the evaluation report. The majority of recognition centres are of a public nature. Therefore, it was of little surprise that the modalities of appointment of the majority of them reflect typical public approaches, i.e. internal delegation of powers, ministerial orders, normative acts, direct agreements or direct appointments. These are modalities of appointment that, by their nature, exclude competition. It is surprising therefore that the percentage of recognition centres being appointed with modalities not based on competition (96 %) is by far larger than the 71 % of those recognition centres of a public nature. In other words, most recognition centres not of a public nature are appointed using regulatory instruments of the public administration.

12. Programme handbook. Programme implementation took mainly place by way of individual and separate projects of diverse character. Therefore, no handbook had been developed. It was however noted in the evaluation report that reporting, monitoring and documentation are insufficient and recommendations for new tools were put forward.

13. Preparatory studies. No evidence about ex-ante studies was given. However nine recognition centres which were subject to formal quality control mechanisms were taken into consideration. In general, they referred to an overall assessment of recognition centres’ performances, being carried out by internal audit (four cases) and/or by external review of the mother organisation (six cases). Only three were subject to the guidance of a steering committee, while peer reviews were being implemented by one NARIC on credential evaluation. None of the recognition centres was subject to more formal processes, such as ISO 9001 certification.

14. Social partners. The only evidence from social partner involvement (which may be less critical in higher education than in VET) is an interview with a stakeholder. It is indicative that the one organisation interviewed (Union of Industrial Employers Confederations Europe) was not aware of the existence of the recognition centres and their network; all the others knew to some degree and agreed to be interviewed.

During the implementation phase

15. Dissemination practice. The study makes critical remarks about dissemination of information produced by the programme. Dissemination of network project results is not the main concern of most recognition centres. A minority disseminate their reports to other centres and some of them confused dissemination of results with delivery of the activity report to DG EAC. The executive summary points out that the specific network obligation needs to be addressed. In particular it needs to set how and when somebody is responsible for the authentication of information, the mechanisms for collection and dissemination and tools for secure dissemination.

16. Management structure. The network structure was analysed through qualitative questions directed to NARIC national administrators. For example one of the respondents identified a major problem of the network structure: Unlike other networks, NARIC has no specific European secretariat (like Eurydice, Tempus, etc.). Only one person from the European Commission is devoted to the coordination of the NARIC and it is not their only task. Consequently there are relatively few network activities undertaken except those by some individual centres. ENIC is, according to the evaluators, a better example of what a network should be like. Finally the evaluators recommended, ‘that DG EAC should reconsider the structure of the NARIC network in function of its (network) mandate. In particular, DG EAC’s involvement and role shall be reassessed. No major resistances emerge from recognition centres in acknowledging the right of DG EAC to play a steering role of the network, which appears to the evaluators
to be a proper function for the Commission to play. This will require additional human resources from the Commission side’.

17. Stakeholder motivation. It is the nature of their activity, the mandate of many and in the interest of all NARICs to participate in the network. This participation not only grants several benefits with hardly any cost, but provides funding opportunities. In contrast, once funding is assured, the motivation to contribute to the network, document project activities, outputs and effects or ensure proper dissemination is reduced.

18. Stakeholders’ activities. A specific series of semi-structured interviews were carried out with eight informed stakeholders in order to understand their familiarity with the NARIC network, the nature of their institutional relations with the network, their satisfaction and their expectations. Among the interviewees, one was poorly informed about the recognition centres and their network (Erasmus student network). Their low visibility to stakeholders was criticised and prompted recommendations by the evaluators.

19. Transitional arrangements. The evaluation aimed to identify ‘useful lessons and recommendations for the future activities of the Network, including its ability to meet the challenges of the development of transnational education in general and of the Bologna process in particular.’ After having dealt with the Bologna process, a whole chapter of the final report was devoted to transnational education. National regulation and accreditation has obviously started to react to transnational education. The analysis focuses on four major aspects of transnational education: national treatment, transparency and market access. It points out, that the General Agreement of Trade in Services (GATS) may have a strong future impact on education. The so called Most Favoured Nation treatment clause of international law (the non-discrimination principle) guarantees equal opportunities for suppliers from all WTO Members. However, it does not require any degree of market openness. In the following chapter the theme was expanded by dealing with the phenomenon of globalisation. Globalisation caused large scale diversification, internationalisation and digitalisation (the virtual campus) of higher education in the last decade and increased transnational education.

20. Mainstreaming provisions (see Section 2.5.5).

21. Complementary activities. The study points out that the legal framework complicates complementary activities. Under the principle of subsidiarity, there are no Community provisions imposing mutual recognition of diplomas (except for certain regulated occupations that are referred to below under the heading of recognition for professional purposes (21)). For this reason there are currently no diplomas that are recognised at European level for academic purposes (22). Universities, which are autonomous institutions, are entirely responsible for the content of their curricula and for awarding diplomas and certificates to students. The authorities of the Member State concerned recognise the diplomas and certificates. ‘A major strength of the (Bologna) process is its complementarity with other developments in progress. It reinforces and it is being reinforced by other

(21) Regulated professions: the sectoral system (nurses responsible for general care, dental practitioners, veterinary surgeons, midwives, architects, pharmacists or doctors). The general system where one of two Directives will be applicable, depends on the level of studies recognised by the diploma: either Directive 89/48/EEC for the recognition of higher-education diplomas awarded on completion of professional education and training of at least three years duration (A-levels or equivalent such as the Bac+ three years), or Directive 92/51/EEC which covers diplomas, certificates and other vocational training titles at a lower level than those covered by Directive 89/48/EEC. The contact points for the regulated professions are listed at http://europa.eu.int/comm/internal_market/en/qualifications/contact.htm [cited 3.12.2003] and in the many cases are also the NARIC centres. Lifelong learning or continuing professional development remains a matter for Member States. There have been a number of legal disputes in this field from 1997 onwards. See for example the cases of hospital administrators and pharmacists in France; use of University degrees in Germany; and Ski Instructors in Italy. http://europa.eu.int/comm/internal_market/en/qualifications/01-186.htm#3 [cited 3.12.2003].

(22) Even degrees from perhaps the most ‘European’ Higher Education Institution, the European University Institute (EUI, set up by all Member States) in Florence, Italy, are recognised in the Member States via State Treaties between the EUI and each Member State.
tools/factors which point in the same direction: Lisbon Convention, Diploma Supplement, ENQA, EU Directives, EU mobility programmes including ECTS, ENIC/NARIC network and reforms entailed by the accession process to the EU in the countries concerned. (23) (Haug and Tauch; 2001).

After the programme had reached maturity, been completed or was terminated
22. Programme context (for the policy context see point 6). The evaluators scrutinised the reports of all the projects financed over the period and their quality varies considerably, spanning from excellent to unacceptable. Several recognition centres seem to be unconcerned about the quality of their reports and the feeling is gained that reporting is being undertaken as an unavoidable bureaucratic exercise. There is evidently a cultural divide here, which might be overcome by setting clear reporting guidelines.

23. Programme timing. The period observed was from 1997 to 2001 only. The activities of the evaluators started on 1 December 2001; on 1 March 2002 an interim report was delivered to the Commission and the comments received are integrated/addressed in the present final report which was delivered on 10 July 2002 in its draft form for comment.

24. Programme budget. A specific set of questions aimed to trace a profile of financing and costs of recognition centres. With the exception of the very small recognition centres, (where salaries have a lower impact on costs than in the majority of centres, while travel and conference costs have a higher impact) the size of NARIC is not directly related to the impact on the overall budget of different cost items. ‘Salaries’ is by far the item having the highest impact on the budget of recognition centres (an average 64 %). ‘Travel’ and ‘overheads’ are the second ex-aequo categories having the highest impact on NARIC costs, with an average 11 % each. ‘Overheads’, totalling on average 11 % of the costs of recognition centres, have a very different impact on the different centres.

25. EU priorities. The present situation is described under VET is the same as in professional recognition with regard to number of active recognition centres: 14 are active in the domain (24) (52 %) while 13 are not (48 %). The identity of recognition centres varies (i.e. there is no direct correspondence between the activity on the two domains) and perspectives of development are totally different. Recognition of qualification/degree as a guiding assessment is by far the more diffused way (75 %) to deliver assessments. In separate cross tables the monthly contacts of recognition centres amongst each other are listed.

26. Programme spill-over. There is a general move to expand the scope of the Network’s activity action beyond the narrow mandate assigned by the Socrates II decision. This development meets with the wishes of many involved but requires formal processes leading to the adoption of comprehensive terms of reference for the network, the identification of those taking part, the delegation of clear roles and responsibilities and the approval of internal rules. Structured multi-yearly planning cycles also need to be adopted. In the absence of such processes, the enlargement of the scope of the network is destined to be a source of further problems.

27. Monitoring tools. A set of multiple methods and tools had been used to monitor the networking process. For example, for ENIC the monitoring of messages exchanged over the list by the recognition centres appeared relevant to the understanding of some important points of the evaluative mandate and was therefore carried out. For more details about the methodology of the study see Section 2.5.3.

28. Programme flexibility. No ex-ante evaluation has been done.

(23) This view contrasts with ‘In order better to understand the Community rules on the recognition of diplomas, a distinction must first be made between recognition for academic purposes (i.e. you would like your title to be recognised because you wish to continue your studies) and recognition for professional purposes (i.e. you would like your title to be recognised because you wish to work in a certain profession).’ http://www.aubg.bg/_files/cep/Erasmus/Recognition_diplomas.doc [cited 7.1.2004].

(24) The text of the question was: ‘does your centre deal with recognition of vocational education and training?’. 
29. Systemic impact. Being part of the higher education system and in some countries situated inside Ministries, recognition centres have high systemic impact. The closer they are to government, the higher they value their impact (and the more restricted they are in undertaking initiatives not entrusted by the government). Recognition centres were requested to break down monthly contacts per area of activity per category of user. The following 10 categories of users were considered: national students; foreign students; academic staff of national Universities; academic staff of foreign Universities; administrative staff of national Universities; administrative staff of foreign Universities; organisations; career guidance institutions; other recognition centres; European Commission. Recognition centres were left free to include extra categories and some of them did so. The following additional users were included: national ministries and institutions; private enterprises, insurance companies, etc.; basic and secondary schools/education institutions; national students studying abroad; persons with a foreign qualification; social organisations; employers. The outcome was as follows:

Clients of recognition centres are mainly foreign students (43 %), followed by national students (20 %). Together these two categories make up the majority of the recognition centres’ customers. A second group, ‘Universities’ account for 12 % of the total, which increases to 17 % if considering academic recognition only. Inter-NARIC requests for information/documentation are frequent (6 %) particularly when considering that these are only one of several ways for recognition centres to collaborate and interchange information.

30. Dissemination phasing. Dissemination of project results is not the main concern of recognition centres. A minority disseminate their reports to other centres and some confuse dissemination of results with the delivery of the activity report to DG EAC. About the 45 % of questionnaire respondents admitted to either only sending the report to EAC or to not undertaking any dissemination activity. Some of them complain of the absence of feedback from DG EAC and/or other colleagues when sending to the network. For the purpose of the present analysis, the sending of reports to DG EAC is not considered a dissemination activity. A further 40 % of respondents say that they usually send out their reports to all of the recognition centres or as in one case they publish their reports on the NARIC website. About 15 % of respondents deliver oral presentation of the results of their activities at yearly meetings.

The evaluation process

31. Development process. Carried out with the strong involvement of the Steering Group, the NARICs themselves and stakeholders and clients.

32. Evaluation culture. Among those recognition centres subject to evaluation the majority (66 %) considered evaluation as a confidential process the results of which are not to be disclosed to third parties. Only three out of the nine recognition centres subject to a formal process of evaluation agreed to disclose their reports to the evaluators of the present exercise. Individual recognition centres were also irritated by the request for interviews and collaborated only on a personal basis. The claim to confidentiality indicates a transparent evaluation culture which has not been internalised by the recognition centres.

33. Evaluation method. The multi-method mix makes the overall picture of the evaluation more reliable. However, there were weaknesses: 10 visits have been paid to as many recognition centres. Each visit lasted about half a day which might be not have been sufficient for thorough consulting work. The semi-structured approach of interviewing different national centres yielded in-depth results for each centre at the expense of greater comparability. However, the report is comprehensive and detailed.

34. Evaluation completeness. The total list of NARIC national key points is far longer than the number of centres evaluated with a total of 30 national key points. Among the 10 countries visited there were two candidate countries (Bulgaria and the Czech Republic) and one EFTA country, Norway. All components of the programme were evaluated: historical background, financing,
external developments, academic, professional and VET recognition. The case studies represent the major vehicle for in-depth project knowledge. However, the length of the evaluation report (around 500 pages including annexes with case studies and project cards) raises questions about its ability to be assimilated and thus its impact.

35. Evaluation indicators. A criticism is that the term indicator was used first indiscriminately to refer to the tool or reference used for the measurement of observed elements and for the result of the measurement and observation.

36. Evaluation skills. The methodology was appropriate to the objective of the evaluation. The amount of secondary data taken into consideration is high. Questionnaires were carefully drawn up in collaboration with the steering group and covered all relevant fields. However, the objectivity of the report can be questioned for some of the assumptions. Few passages contain value judgements, which are of a more subjective nature. For detailed information about the methodology used, see ‘Methodology’ in the textual analysis (Section 2.5.).

37. Evaluation censorship. No evidence given. In contrast, the high involvement and substantial comments of the Evaluation Steering Group suggests that the content was taken seriously and was disseminated.

38. Evaluation budget. An overall cost of EUR 44,915 was envisaged for the evaluation study, which is about 1.5 % of the project sum evaluated.

39. Evaluation dissemination. It is envisaged that the evaluation report is made available to the project partners and to all Member States.

40. Reporting formats. There is no evidence that the dissemination materials are being targeted to different audiences. The terms of reference require only a report.
References


OMAS. *Final assessment report for assistance funded under Phare VET reform programme in the Czech Republic.* Bratislava: OMAS Consortium – Middle Unit, 1999.


*Questionnaire for final evaluation*, Phare programme BG 95.06. Programme valorisation meeting in Sofia, 2002.


Technické úkoly v souvislosti s realizací programu Leonardo na národní úrovni. Funkce přeijmané Národními koordinačními jednotkami.
