



CEDEFOP

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of Vocational Training



Education and Culture DG
Lifelong Learning Programme

Study visit group report

Group No 251

Title of the visit	Economic downturn as a catalyst for promoting education reforms
Topic	Reforms in national education and training systems
City, country	Riga, Latvia
Type of visit	General education
Dates of visit	20/05/2013 - 24/05/2013
Group reporter	Rachel Morris and Helen Warner

I FINDINGS

This section summarises the findings of the group while visiting host institutions, discussing issues with the hosts and within the group. You will be reflecting on what you learnt every day. But to put them together and give an overall picture, you need to devote a special session to prepare the final report on the last day of the visit.

In this section, it is important that you describe not only things you learnt about the host country but also what you learnt about the countries represented by group members.

1. One of the objectives of the study visits programme is to exchange examples of good practice among hosts and participants. Cedefop will select well-described projects/programmes/initiatives and disseminate them to former participants and a wider public, including potential partners for future projects. Therefore it is important that you identify and describe all aspects that, in your view, make these projects/programmes/initiatives successful and worth exploring.

Describe each of the good practices you learnt about during the visit (both from the hosts and from one another) indicating the following:

title of the project/programme /initiative	country	name of the institution that implements it (if possible, provide a website)	contact person (if possible) who presented the programme to the group	whom the project/ programme/ initiative addresses	what features of the project/programme/initiative make it an example of good practice
Interest education (extra curricular 'hobby' education)	Latvia	Ministry of Education funds - local interest centres/schools implement. We saw a great example of a centre in Cesis.	Rudolfs Kalvans	All pupils	Encouraging children's self-development and motivation levels. Inclusion for all pupils. Spending time in school after formal lessons in a productive way.
ProReKo (Project Competence Centers for the Regions)	Germany	Ministry of education www.proreko.de	Hilde Geller	All vocational schools	Project Competence Centre for the Regions - schools get more control over budgets, the right to appoint and promote teachers, introduction of objectives and key indicators to measure results and quality management system.
ECLAIR Programme	France	Ministry of Education http://eduscol.education.fr/cid52780/l-experimentation-clair.html	Arnaud Debrand	Schools	'Schools for ambition, innovation, success' - programme for networks of schools in deprived areas of France, offering more autonomy to school teams to innovate in the delivery of the curriculum and pedagogical methods. More control for head teachers over recruiting teachers and more rewards for staff - eg priority for promotion.
Bilingual schools	Latvia	Riga Classical Gymnasium	Romans Alijevs	Pupils and teachers	Preparing pupils for globalization in a knowledge based economy. The example we saw (Riga Classical Gymnasium) taught in Latvian, English and Russian and made good use of CLIL.
Centre for Innovation in Education	Romania	TEHNE Romania www.tehne.ro	Daniela Visinica	Teachers	Promoting, supporting and monitoring the implementation of ICT in education and training, with a focus on e-learning and

					computer assisted instruction. Evaluation and monitoring of social programmes with a significant education component.
Happy School ('Radosna szkola')	Poland	Ministry of Education Poland http://www.men.gov.pl/index.php?option=com_content&view=section&layout=blog&id=61&Itemid=324	Jerzy Kiszkiel	Schools for children aged 6 to 9	Building playgrounds and providing teaching resources.
Teacher training in CLIL	Italy	Ministry of Education www.istruzione.it	Laura Virli	Teachers	Professional development and training for teachers in delivering lessons in Content Language Integrated Learning.
Funding reform driving efficiency and transparency in England	England	Ministry of Education http://www.education.gov.uk/aboutdfe/executiveagencies/efa/fundingallocations/a00215225/school-funding-reform	Rachel Morris	Schools, local authorities	Programme of reform of school funding in England - to increase level of pupil-led funding, to increase transparency and simplicity and drive efficiency.
Modernizacao tecnologica	Portugal	Ministry of Education http://www.dgeec.mec.pt/np4/100/%7B\$clientServletPath%7D/?newsId=160&fileName=mt_ensino_portugal.pdf	Alvaro A. Santos	Schools, pupils	Programme to disseminate ICT among students and teachers, as well as equipping schools with modern technology.
Policy of learning English from first grade (age 7)	Latvia Spain	Ministry of Education	Rudolfs Kalvans (Latvia) Mar Aranda (Spain)	Schools, pupils	Encourages early learning of a second language. Provides possibility for students to compete on a world stage.

* You can describe as many good practices as you find necessary. You can add rows to the table.

2. The study visits programme aims to promote and support policy development and cooperation in lifelong learning. That is why it is important to know what you learnt about such policies and their implementation during your visit. You are invited to describe your findings concerning the following:

2.1 APPROACHES TAKEN BY PARTICIPATING COUNTRIES (BOTH HOST AND PARTICIPANTS') REGARDING THE THEME OF THE VISIT. ARE THERE ANY SIMILAR APPROACHES/MEASURES IN PARTICIPATING COUNTRIES? WHAT ASPECTS ARE SIMILAR AND WHY? WHAT ASPECTS ARE DIFFERENT AND WHY?

Similarities:

Although there is a diverse educational system in the individual countries represented in the study visit, we have agreed on a number of similarities of both educational reforms related to the economic downturn and some reforms that were not related to the economic downturn.

First, we agreed that school budget reductions were generally the case in most countries, however, we note that in some countries (Poland and England), budget reductions were either minimal or not relevant.

Second, we see a tendency for many of the countries to consider how to improve the vocational education system, either at the early stage, or in the advanced stages.

Third, we notice that many countries have reformed the compulsory school age, noting a tendency to start primary education earlier and leaving secondary school later. This may be related to the economic downturn - to help to avoid youth unemployment (raising the leaving age) and allowing parents to participate in the labour market (lowering the starting age).

Fourth, we note that many head teachers in schools are required to be even more efficient. Efficiency is being driven through increased autonomy, tighter budgets and is supported through stronger quality assurance (inspection and external examination).

Summary:

Related to the Economic Crisis:

- Budget Reductions
 - Cuts to budgets for education systems
 - However some education budgets increasing or remaining the same (east Europe, Poland)
 - Some countries/schools are using European funding
- Improving vocational training education
- Changes in compulsory school age
- Making head teachers more efficient/accountable, such as by inspection and external examination
- More school autonomy

- Legal changes (increased level of new laws regarding education)
- More teacher training taking place at the school rather than external
- Curriculum reform

Not related to Economic Crisis:

- Mainstreaming disabled students
- Increased level of teaching English

Differences:

Related to the Economic Crisis:

- Differences remain in the level of school autonomy
 - Financial
 - Set teacher salaries
 - Hire teachers
 - Administrative
 - Class sizes
 - Professional development (quality management)
- The Role of the Municipality in promoting education reform
 - England: low level small role for municipalities
 - Latvia/Germany: high level
- Changing structure of the school day
 - Some increasing length of day/term: England, Latvia
 - Some decreasing: Italy, Portugal, Germany (due to budget cuts)
- Competition
 - Market-based approach to drive up standards in some countries but not in others - eg in England but not in France
 - Related to the principle of money following pupils in some countries
- Level/Distribution of funding
 - Money follows student
 - Difference in way education is funded: local, central, including funding of teacher salaries
 - Some countries protecting school budgets (England)
 - Other countries cutting budgets (Spain France Italy Romania)
 - Teachers' salaries: Increased - Poland; kept the same - France, UK, Germany, Italy, Macedonia; Lowered - Spain, Latvia, Portugal, Romania
- Special Education Needs
 - Level of special provision for children with disabilities varied
 - In Latvia there appears to be a high level of support for pupils with special needs, whereas there is less in others.
 - Challenge: to include children with very different skills and abilities

2.2 CHALLENGES FACED BY PARTICIPATING COUNTRIES (INCLUDING HOST) IN THEIR EFFORTS TO IMPLEMENT POLICIES RELATED TO THE THEME OF THE VISIT. WHAT ARE THE CHALLENGES? ARE THEY COMMON CHALLENGES? IF SO, WHY? IF NOT, WHY NOT?

Reduced education budgets

A common challenge is improving educational attainment when education budgets are being frozen or cut (although in some countries budgets were protected: Poland has a rising education budget and in England the schools budget is protected). This was seen as the main impact of the economic downturn on the education system.

A related problem has been the political and presentation challenges associated with cutting teacher numbers or teacher pay when there are falling budgets (and demographics). For example in Lower Saxony, Germany there was a commitment to keep the number of teachers constant but there were fewer pupils and tight budgets. In other countries, there is unemployment amongst teachers (for example in Poland). Where demographics and budgets are falling, smaller schools may become unviable and need to close which can cause difficulties for local students and communities.

Political change

Another common challenge was the amount of reform from central government because of lots of political change (this was highlighted by participants from Latvia, Spain and Italy). Often reforms were not properly rolled-out or embedded before the policies were changed and they were often not evaluated properly.

2.3 NAME AND DESCRIBE EFFECTIVE AND INNOVATIVE SOLUTIONS YOU HAVE IDENTIFIED THAT PARTICIPATING COUNTRIES (BOTH HOST AND PARTICIPANTS) APPLY TO ADDRESS THE CHALLENGES MENTIONED IN QUESTION 2.2. PLEASE MENTION SPECIFIC COUNTRY EXAMPLES.

Reduced education budgets

- A common solution was to aim to improve the efficiency of the school system ('more with less')
 - Some countries were aiming to drive efficiency by giving more autonomy to schools (e.g. the academies programme in England) or in some circumstances moving to a more market-based system
 - Countries including Latvia, Italy, Germany, England and Poland have made changes to their administrative arrangements. For example merging or closing institutions to save money and streamlining processes for administration. This has led to efficiencies because fewer people are involved in delivering

- certain policies but in some situations stretching resources may have compromised quality.
- Where possible, some countries have prioritised spending on education and within that spending on core 'classroom activities'. This has meant that budgets for example for extra-curricular activities have been cut. In Latvia, it appears that the funding for extra-curricular 'interest' education appears to have been relatively protected compared to in other countries.
 - A common theme at the school level was to be more creative on how to motivate staff (because pay and conditions are not as favourable) for example through good, strong, inspirational leadership and improving the status of the teachers.
 - School clusters have been introduced in some countries (for example Portugal), which helps manage budget reductions and the pressure to close small rural schools.

Political change

A suggested solution from participants was to have more consultation in the policy making process with people at every level of the education system: municipalities, headteachers, teachers, staff, students, parents etc. The importance of a stable, independent civil service was also highlighted.

2.4 ASSESSMENT OF THE TRANSFERABILITY OF POLICIES AND PRACTICES. COULD ANY EXAMPLES OF GOOD PRACTICE PRESENTED IN THIS REPORT BE APPLIED AND TRANSFERRED TO OTHER COUNTRIES? IF SO, WHY? IF NOT, WHY NOT?

It may be difficult to apply some of these practices in other countries because of the political climate. For example, some countries are making much deeper cuts and would be unable to protect education spending.

Because of the very high level nature of the topic for the study visit it was difficult to identify specific examples of transferrable practice, however some links were made on the school level examples - for example how to recognise teachers or how to drive efficiency through autonomy - which will be discussed on a bilateral basis after the visit.

The policy of learning a second language from age 7, as in Latvia and Spain, is transferable to other administrations - but there may be difficulties in recruiting enough specialist teachers and in budgeting for those teachers. This may also be in conflict with concept of increased autonomy for schools.

3. Creating networks of experts, building partnerships for future projects is another important objective of the study visit programme.

Please state whether and which ideas for future cooperation have evolved during meetings and discussions.

Several participants have expressed interest in exploring further cooperation through exchange visits - particularly members of the group who are teachers/ school leaders (Italy, Spain, Romania, Portugal)

The Portuguese, Romanian and French representatives are already working together on a school partnership project through Leonardo - they have made an application and are awaiting the results.

Similarly, the Romanian and Italian representatives have applied for a Comenius multilateral project and are awaiting results.

TO SUM UP

4. What is the most interesting/useful information that the group believes should be communicated to others? To whom, do you think, this information will be of most interest?

The most useful finding of the visit has been the similarities in the challenges that countries face. A lot of work is happening in national governments, local administrations and at school level to manage the impact of the economic downturn and there could be more sharing of ideas rather than reinventing the wheel. This is probably easiest to facilitate between national governments because there are fewer organisations but more support and facilitation would be helpful at more local levels.

THANK YOU!