

Main findings and recommendations for relevant actions to support the mobility of apprentices and young people in IVET

During the Pro Mobility project several **valuable experiences** connected to the question of how to improve qualifying mobility in terms of quantity and quality could be gained – in the course of the **political process**, i.e. when dealing with PMC members and discussing this subject with political stakeholders as well as in the course of the **practical process**, i.e. when drawing up the PMT and organising the prototype exchanges. In the following the main conclusions shall be summarised:

Political process

The Pro Mobility project **initiated or intensified discussions** on qualifying mobility among stakeholders. This process is by no means completed in the three participating countries. It is a long-term aim of Pro Mobility (cf. I.1.1 above) to keep this subject on the political agenda and lobby for the implementation of qualifying mobility to become part of the internationalisation strategy of the VET systems. The political discussions have focussed on the following topics:

- ▶ **Legal and administrative issues:** In order to reach a similar situation in terms of mobility in VET as in HE it is necessary to **create a clear legal basis** for it. The possibility of going abroad for a longer period during the VET programme must be anchored in the respective VET laws. It is also important to clearly state the circumstances under which the mobility periods and the competences acquired during these periods are recognised. Participants must be sure that the time they spent in a hosting VET provider (school or company) does not prolong the VET programme in the sending country, nor should exams already taken abroad have to be repeated at home. Besides creating the legal basis **administrative burdens have to be abolished**. It is advisable to establish (and finance) supporting structures, e.g. mobility offices (as they exist at universities) that assist VET participants and providers in the organisation of exchanges. Such offices could also contribute to enhancing the quality of mobility as they could review the whole process at the end and implement improvements. They could furthermore set quality criteria that guarantee certain standards (e.g. as regards the training offers abroad, the premises, the teachers and trainers, the accommodation etc.). On a political level it is also essential to encourage the development and implementation of European transparency instruments in each member

state, such as the National Qualifications Framework and – particularly relevant for mobility – the European Credit System for Vocational Education and Training.

- ▶ **Individual mobility:** In order to enable individuals to participate in mobility it is important to **create the necessary supporting structures**. While it might be easier for schools to organise mobility exchanges (though this cannot be generalised), it is more difficult for companies (in particular SMEs) due to lack of time and personnel resources. It would enhance the number and also the quality of mobility exchanges, if each country had the required infrastructure to offer support. If it is a declared aim to enhance qualifying mobility from a political perspective, the required financial means for creating such supporting structures must be provided. Another important aspect is connected to the funding of mobility (cf. also the following point). Via **pool projects** organisations can apply for funding for a number of individuals – this has proved to be an effective way in countries where such projects are possible (e.g. in Austria).

- ▶ **Financing of mobility:** Mobility exchanges can be quite costly. The Leonardo da Vinci measure within the Lifelong Learning Programme is the most important source of funding for existing exchanges. Usually, however, it does not cover all the expenses. Thus, national governments, social partners, sectoral organisations but also schools and companies should be encouraged to **contribute to the funding of mobility exchanges**. A problematic issue that has surfaced repeatedly in the political discussions during the Pro Mobility period is connected to the monthly remuneration apprentices receive from their training companies. When apprentices go abroad, companies temporarily lose a workforce but are obliged to continue to pay the remuneration. This problem needs further discussion on a political level. Reciprocal exchanges could be one of the solutions, though they are difficult to organise. It might also be possible to establish transnational training alliances or provide subsidies for companies that enable their apprentices to go abroad.

- ▶ **Raising awareness:** In order to enhance the number of qualifying mobility exchanges it will be necessary to raise more awareness of their **added value** for all participants. In workshops and conferences the advantages of going abroad during a VET programme should be highlighted, best practice examples should be shown to demonstrate in what ways participants can profit from temporary stays in another country. It is important to win multipliers, e.g. teachers, headmasters, company owners, etc. that can help convince VET participants and their parents to take their chances.

- ▶ **Establishing networks:** One of the key aspects of Pro Mobility was the establishment of networks and partnerships (cf. also I.2.3) It is through these networks that different situations and systems can become more familiar, prejudices can be eliminated and **mutual trust can be established**. Thus it is important that PMCs cooperate transnationally more closely in future and try to find joint solutions to common problems.

Practical process

Practical insights could be gained during the 56 prototype exchanges. Even though the VET systems in the three countries differ, the **practical challenges** that surfaced in the three countries are fairly similar. In the following these challenges as well as possible solutions and suggestions are discussed:

- ▶ **Information and instruments:** A lot of information has been collected, instruments and tools have been produced for promoting (qualifying) mobility over the past few years (financed mostly through Leonardo da Vinci). However, they cannot always be found easily or are easily accessible. In order to enhance mobility it is essential to **make information and infrastructure traceable** and **offer them for free** via well-known channels (e.g. through thematically relevant websites etc.). The Pro Mobility Toolkit aims at providing such information and tools in an easy-to-use style (FAQs). More tools already available should be attached to the PMT in future in order to make it a comprehensible source of information for everyone interested in (longer-term) mobility exchanges.
- ▶ **Exchange organisation:** Exchange organisations can **positively contribute to the quantity and quality of mobility exchanges**. They have the necessary know-how for the organisation of exchanges, have contacts in other countries, know the situation and systems in these countries and can offer support for all mobility participants. Thus it is advisable to establish such bodies in all countries. They can particularly assist companies, above all SMEs, in the organisation of exchanges, as the Austrian examples IFA (International Young Workers' Exchange) and atempo show.
- ▶ **Establishing networks:** The setting up of partnerships is an important **prerequisite for boosting mobility** in VET. The start of mobility exchange relations is facilitated, if two VET providers know each other, their VET programmes and their curricula. This became particularly evident during Pro Mobility where the exchange partners agreed to continue

their good cooperation also beyond the project's lifetime. As at the beginning of exchange relations quite some effort is required to get the project started, a continuous cooperation redeems the time and money invested (e.g. for preparatory visits, for drawing up learning outcome descriptions etc.)

- ▶ **Recognition:** One of the key success factors of qualifying mobility is the recognition of the mobility period spent abroad as well as the learning outcomes acquired. In order to enable recognition, it is necessary to have **a clear legal situation** in this respect (cf. above) as well as **tools, processes, documents** etc. agreed upon between sending and receiving institutions. It is first and foremost important to have a good description of the qualification that the VET programme leads to. This description should cover the knowledge, the skills and the competences (learning outcomes) to be acquired. It should be stipulated what a learner knows and is able to do at the start of his/her mobility period and what he/she is supposed to acquire abroad. This clear-cut description can facilitate the communication between sending and receiving organisations by providing a kind of “common language”. The VQTS-model (Vocational Qualification Transfer System) can be used as a best practice example for such an approach. Furthermore, it must be agreed upon prior to the exchange which methods are used to test the knowledge, skills and competences of the learner abroad and how the learning outcomes are certified. The learner must be sure that the learning outcomes he/she acquires are validated in his/her sending organisation. Both institutions involved could be supported in this decisive process by an exchange organisation. Moreover, transparency tools such as ECVET could support this key stage in mobility periods. For subjects/learning contents not treated abroad solutions have to be found as well. As the learning process continues in the sending organisation, mobility participants often miss out on them. What proved useful in Pro Mobility was the provision of materials via online learning platforms. In this way learners have access to exercise sheets, materials, etc. and can also keep contact to fellow-students and teachers.
- ▶ **Interface problem:** The VET systems and programmes differ considerably among European countries. This often raises the question of the compatibility of curricula when it comes to mobility exchanges. In order to see if two programmes are congruent, a **precise description of the learning outcomes** should be provided (cf. above “recognition”). Another issue that could diminish the interface problem is **modularisation**. The smaller the units of curricula are, the more easily they are comparable and transferable.
- ▶ **“Practical problems”:** Even if the circumstances in VET become more “mobility-friendly” (i.e. clear legal situation, introduction of ECVET, good outcome-oriented description of

qualification, etc.) a number of **practical problems cannot be easily solved**. First, there is the language problem. Unless students speak the language of the hosting country well enough, it will be difficult for them to follow the tuition in the hosting institution. Thus, a good and intensive **linguistic preparation** would be required before going abroad. Moreover, many VET learners are – compared to HE students – rather young and in most cases under age. This is why parents are often hesitant to agree to longer-term mobility stays abroad. One possibility would be to establish a **guidance system**, i.e. a person accompanying learners during their travels, a mentor being available abroad, a “buddy” taking care of the learning in his/her spare time etc.

Proposals for expansion and/or multiplication of this type of initiative, and to what extent the existing mobility measures within the III Programme should/could be adapted to reinforce the transnational mobility of this target group

On the basis of the experiences gained during Pro Mobility, the following **suggestions** can be made:

- ▶ It would be advisable to support the **establishment of networks** among VET schools and companies.
- ▶ The **establishment of exchange organisations** that support the organisation, implementation and review process of mobility exchanges should be encouraged.
- ▶ It would be important to support the **drawing up of qualification descriptions** using the tools provided and process in ECVET.
- ▶ The production of **tools and instruments** that are useful for organising and implementing mobility exchanges should be encouraged. It is also important to make them centrally available, easily accessible and useable.
- ▶ More **awareness raising events** should be organised/supported for VET schools, companies, VET participants and their parents.