



RECOMFOR FINAL CONFERENCE

“From RECOMFOR to NETINVET”
Paris, March 28th-29th 2011

Opening

Pauline VAN DEN BOSCH (EVTA) explains that, with the conclusion of the RECOMFOR project, the time has come to chart out the future, by building partnerships with tools that have been developed through the project. This event is not intended as a formal and comprehensive presentation of these, but rather to spark inspiration and stir motivation of participants, in particular along three lines: designing tools (i.e., tutor guides, quality charters, mobility action), focusing on outcomes (based on testimonials), and using the network as a mean of achieving progress through joint effort. Participants are encouraged to be as concrete and practical as possible in their contributions.

The synergetic joint efforts enabled by the European Credit System for Vocational Education and Training (ECVET) toward learning outcomes will now be carried forward by the NETINVET network.

➤ **Introduction by Hugues POUZIN, Head of CGI**

CGI, represented by Hugues POUZIN is the promoter of RECOMFOR project. It is a grouping of small companies in the field of wholesale involved in particular in international trade, a sector little-affected by the recent economic crisis. Because the companies represented are relatively small in scale and post stable revenue, the sector continues to hire and boasts an age profile younger than the average, most often on open-ended contracts. As 40% of young people in the sector are executives, there is a clear need for skilled workers.

This is one of CGI's main motives in becoming involved in the networks. Through a special agreement with the French Ministry of Education, it was able to develop RECOMFOR project. Its work in this setting, like that conducted with other institutions, has been not only productive, but also a pleasure.

➤ **Introduction by Richard MANIAK, French Ministry of Education**

Richard MANIAK offers the institutional outlook, which contrasts yet also complements that of its partners, whether companies, training institutions, student communities, etc. Each was not only part of the broader system but a solution provider in itself.

He explains that the framework was originally established between development authorities and professional federations, the aim being to enable joint undertakings. The countries originally

involved where those involved in COMINTER project, a previous European project that gave birth to RECOMFOR. They have then been joined by other countries. Thanks to this system and the work carried out over the long haul, from simple information- and experience-sharing, there are clear lines and structures, and the educational degrees offered across Europe can be easily compared. With this common frame of reference in place, students can move from one country to another, while the commitment of the training centres produces the desired mobility.

From the incipient stages of the RECOMFOR project, more and more partners have come on board and the network is now well-established and benefits from strong mutual trust relationships. NETINVET, now to be funded by its own resources, will be reliant on the arrival of new institutions and continuing positive momentum.

This final conference of RECOMFOR project is not really an end: it is the start of a strong and new sustainable network through NETINVET.

Outcomes of RECOMFOR Project

I. 1st Focus: Building Partnerships with Mobility Tools

Presented by Rob VAN WEZEL (Kenniscentrum Handel, Netherlands) and Gerard VAN DEN AKKER (Albeda College, Netherlands)

Exchange programmes abroad are not only seen by learners as an opportunity for pleasure. Though certainly a valid aim, particularly during youth, mobility is now viewed as also contributing to an individual's overall development and adding important value to any résumé.

Within this context, ECVET is an instrument for mobility and recognition, intended as a pioneering, inspiring project. It aims to recognise achievements of learners abroad, stimulate exchanges and mutual trust through mobility, and recognise learning outcomes without extending education and training pathways. It is structured around the transfer and accumulation of learning outcomes.

In practice, however, a number of obstacles do exist, including language barriers, the lack of degree recognition agreements, the lack of quality charters, still-developing mutual trust and the need for communications platforms so that students and educational establishments can be identified. A successful mobility programme thus requires strong foundational relationship, bolstered by clear, written agreements. In the end, though international mobility is admittedly enjoyable, that enjoyment is not the sole or central purpose.

The presentation concludes with an introduction to the mobility tools developed within the project and now ready for use by training centres: membership agreements, learning agreement, personal transcript of records, quality charters...

These tools are available on www.netinvet.eu for members.

II. 2nd Focus: Experimenting on Mobility Changes: Round Table with Teachers and Learners

Focus Group members included Manuela JABER (Romania), Jan MUIJS (Netherlands), A Participant from Spain, Nathalie BRAHIMI (France), Finda SANKANOU (France) and Khalil HOGGUI (France).

More than 150 learners took part to a mobility experience within the network during RECOMFOR project (in work placement or in training centre).

In the Netherlands, mobility was identified as important for a number of university courses, but also as a way for students to actively learn a different culture and a key contributor to the development of networks.

Similarly, in Romania, mobility has allowed students to acquire experience and develop transversal competences and intercultural awareness, as well as helping them master information and communications technologies (ICT). The programmes remain relatively limited in scope, for the time being, due to limited resources.

The participant from Spain describes returning mobility students as enjoying broader cultural perspective, but also heightened confidence.

In France, there are training courses specifically geared at trainers serving the programmes as well as language courses in English for those departing. Participants in such programmes can expect to come out with concrete practical skills and, in some cases, certification of their level of achievement.

The students present, who have experienced countries as nearby as the Netherlands and Spain to others as far-flung as Taiwan, describe their mobility experiences as educationally valuable, profoundly enriching as well as instructional in the everyday life.

The main obstacles to such programmes today include funding (of particular importance considering the aim of equal opportunity), the need for unified credit systems and recognition of qualifications. The necessity to have a good level in the foreign language concerned is also pointed out. Commitment and determination to work through obstacles are emphasised as the most-needed characteristics for programmes, as these are still-developing, complex and intrinsically human-based endeavours.

Testimonials from the participants of the roundtable highlight the richness of such mobility experiences and the added value that working in a network offers. The network brings new opportunities and facilitates the organisation of mobility.

III. 3rd Focus: Creating a Sustainable Network

Presented by Sophie SALIN, CGI, France

One of the main outcomes of RECOMFOR was the creation of a sustainable network able to continue long after the project ended, not a 2.5-year project that would come to an end, when the European funding did. Preliminary discussions between partner groups on many topics such as methods, potential added value, membership criteria, identity, objective and development outline made it possible to set the basis of the network.

The result was NETINVET, the fruit of lengthy and persistent efforts, complete with a mission, structure and tools.

The name was chosen because it could stand alone and have meaning on its own. It was not specific to international trade, such that the network could be open to other fields in the future if that was desired. The stated aspiration was to connect entities from all 10 partner countries eager to develop and facilitate mobility operations for their learners, through more attractive training programmes, interaction and sharing of best practices. Today, 44 entities have expressed their interest, consisting primarily of training centres, but also professional organisations, are involved and a steering committee will soon be set up to monitor the network. They are backed up by partner companies and competent bodies, which have pledged their support not only in these incipient stages, but also far into the future.

For the training centres, the added value lies in an easier path in developing mobility programmes. For learners, the value of the network (personal experience, more attractive résumés, international contacts and immeasurable lessons learned) has become obvious through the accounts heard today. Lastly, the professional organisations want young people to be well trained and thus have a real interest in supporting vocational and educational (VET) training programmes. They also benefit from the interaction with peer institutions.

The three keywords defined for the network are:

- Quality (which guarantees attractiveness and effectiveness in the present and the future);
- Transparency (which creates confidence and ensures truthfulness);
- Mutual Trust (which is the foundation for any sound relationship).

From tomorrow, NETINVET, currently but a name, will become an association. The hope is that it will remain in operation for long into the future. A steering committee will be set up, decision-making processes enacted and the concrete efforts set in motion. A key part of the network will be the website, where training centres can update information and manage all their mobility operations (requests, responses, tools).

Nicolas BERMOND (50A, France) presents the web site www.netinvet.eu designed with areas respectively for member users and for the public, as well as a distinction between private and public information. NETINVET contains a large database of information and a wide range of tools. The dashboard is the most important part of the site, where training centres can create accounts, make

requests, monitor activity on the site, update and manage their profiles, take part in forum discussions and access tools.

Round Table on the Added Value of the Network

Participants included Cristina DIMAS (CECOA, Portugal), Angels FONT (Generalitat de Catalunya, Spain), Yves PARIZOT (PME Apprentissage, France), Sophie SALIN (CGI, France).

In each country, while international mobility programmes were already in existence, the systems have significantly improved thanks to the contact with other European counterparts. Cristina Dimas explains that one of the main focuses was to build more long-lasting programmes, with consequentially longer-term outcomes than did the one-week stays already in place. She highlights the trust they can now have in other countries' systems, thanks to the agreements and transparent information provided. As a result, there is no longer the perceived need to accompany the young students abroad.

Angels Font describes her organisation's efforts to provide methods, tools, support and advice to institutions in the country, in addition to the participation in Netinvet. It participates as the regional authority in national-level undertakings, specifically in testing academic mobility (training in a non-home training centre), as opposed to outplacement in a work setting, which was already in common use. Nearly all (89%) of the training institutions in the Region turn to the organisation for assistance, and thus enjoy more opportunities for partnership and mobility experiences.

Yves Parizot discusses the openness of the cooperation ties between the various countries, which are free to choose the most compatible countries, organisations, systems, etc., as well as the content of the interaction. The nature of France's ties is evolving: triangular contacts are emerging, as the current relations with Romania and the Netherlands develop to include Germany. Connections will become all the more efficient and enable action within a shorter period of time. Efforts are focusing in particular on English language courses, for the French participating students.

The involvement of companies, for cooperation and work-placement programmes, is becoming more prominent. Sophie Salin explains that this is thanks in part to the requirement that participating training organisations each bring five partner companies into the programme. Crucial now are efforts to bring other sectors on board and secure the lasting commitment of all those involved. The positive feedback and clear benefits for students, as evidenced in the previous session, should be of great assistance in this respect.

NETINVET itself is of real interest to trainers and teachers and being part of it offers an opportunity to give visibility to all the work that is being done and to provide ideas to others. Yves Parizot underscores, in closing, that the best reward the network can receive is the development of multilingualism, a blossoming young generation and a more open society.

Conclusion of the Day: **Round Table on Transfer of Outcomes**

Participants included Alain BULTOT (Ministry of Compulsory Education and Social Promotion, Belgium), Jean-André LASSERE (AFT-IFTIM, France), Daniela ULICNA (GHK Consulting)

The mobility projects undertaken across Europe operate on the basis of very different principles, rooted in national practice, and the COMINTER and RECOMFOR projects are seen by round table participants as offering a new perspective on ECVET, both in terms of approach and implementation. Herein lies one of the benefits of network involvement, namely the opportunity to understand the same situation from many different perspectives. The young programme participants are already accustomed to this way, almost as though it were part of their lifestyle.

This shift toward openness will continue, as the projects continue and thanks to the concurrent communications efforts such as the magazine published by GHK Consulting to promote ECVET work, currently read by some 1,000 subscribers.

This should furthermore be of assistance to new projects, inspired by EVCET. The Eurotranslog project, for instance, is equivalent to COMINTER and just embarking on its mobility component. It wishes to develop the tools for mobility and sees NETINVET as a very good example in this area.

The next recommended step is to work more closely with the relevant authorities, schools and policymakers to move forward. At the same time, participants warn against excessive bureaucracy and structural meshing: when network agreements become unbending requirements, systems and the people involved in them can no longer benefit and indeed “breathe”. The response from the ground confirm that there is a need for such programmes, but also speak to the importance of flexibility. It is the determination to achieve the project’s goals and sustain the programme that should be unswerving, not the methods and means – these need to be carefully and sensitively tailored to the situations.

Members of the Network’s Point of View

Enrico BRESSAN (Centro Produttività Veneto, Italy), Cristofol ESTRELLA (INS Vic, Spain), Bostjan KOSOROK (National Institute for VET, Slovenia)

Enrico BRESSAN explains that mobility programmes in Italy are now, in an important step forward, directly linked to the formal training system. Institutions are now very interested in mobility as a tool at national, regional and sectoral levels and we are currently seeing a kind of mass

mobility in vocational education and training. This raises many challenges and requires a shift from project-based mobility to a more systemic approach – precisely what NETINVET provides.

This systemic approach will provide stability, recognition and mutual trust, and the creation of an infrastructure that will connect projects over longer periods of time. This will enhance professionalisation, where new competences can be managed and recognised. It will also be easier to raise awareness of the importance of mobility because of the ability to communicate on a much wider scale.

He concludes, indicating that the project has yielded significant results and the creation of the association is a move in the right direction. However, the issue of recognition must be addressed, through involvement on the part of the institutions, to bring about real recognition and validation. More generally, the network can act as a meaningful service provider for all schools and training centres involved.

Bostjan KOSOROK and Cristofol ESTRELLA offer a more local perspective. In Slovenia, high schools are free to become involved in mobility as they see fit, and will thus not become part of another network unless clearly invited to do so. Other issues include defining levels of attainment and establishing clear standards of assessment. At Mr Estrella's school, the network has made it possible to focus on international trade and develop strong trust-based relationships with the other partners. Knowledge sharing is a key element of the value the network can bring. As well as developing students, teachers should also be able to avail of exchanges and have the opportunity to teach in other countries. He recommends that all schools in the network provide bi-directional recognition and work placements and hopes that the network will be used not merely as a document-sharing tool, but as a vehicle for action.