

Impact of the Study Visits Programme in Ireland March 2008-June 2010

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Introduction

Léargas is Ireland's National Agency for the management of National, European and International co-operation programmes involving:

- Education and Lifelong Learning
- Vocational Education and Training
- Youth and Community Work
- Guidance in Education

Léargas manages activities in the Lifelong Learning Programme (LLP) which runs from 01 January 2007 until 31 December 2010. The Lifelong Learning Programme supports learning opportunities from childhood to old age in every single life situation.

The Lifelong Learning Programme is composed of four pillars:

- Comenius – School Education
- Grundtvig – Adult Education
- Leonardo da Vinci – Initial and Continuous Vocational Education and Training
- Erasmus – Higher Education (managed in Ireland by the Higher Education Authority)

Across these four pillars is the Transversal Programme composed of four key activities. Study Visits fall under Key Activity 1 (KA1), which is policy development.

The Study Visits programme is managed at European level by Cedefop – the European Centre for the Development of Vocational Training on behalf of the European Commission.

Table 1:
An overview of the Lifelong Learning Programme:

Lifelong Learning Programme 2007 – 2013			
Comenius School education Managed by Léargas	Erasmus Higher education and advanced training Managed by HEA	Leonardo da Vinci Initial & continuing VET Managed by Léargas	Grundtvig Adult education Managed by Léargas
Transversal Programme: 4 key activities – <u>Policy development</u> ; Language learning; ICT; Dissemination Managed by: Léargas and Executive Agency			
Jean Monnet Jean Monnet Action; European Institutions; European Associations Managed by Executive Agency			

This report examines the impact of the Study Visits programme in Ireland from March 2008 to June 2010.

The research for this document is based on final reports from all participants. These reports are completed within a month of the study visit and participants are contractually obliged to complete them. The final reports give an outline of the main findings of participating in the programme and focus on the content, overall satisfaction and transferable aspects of the learning to their own contexts.

This document also includes information from a follow-up questionnaire sent to each participant six months to a year after the completed visit. The follow-up questionnaire was devised by Léargas and participants voluntarily complete this report. Out of the 95 participants in the programme 56% responded to the follow-up questionnaire. The questionnaire focuses on how and if the participants applied any of the knowledge they acquired during their visit.

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1. Aims of the Study Visits Programme

Study Visits for education and vocational training specialists are one of the key actions of the LLP transversal programme, the objective of which is to support policy development and cooperation at European level in lifelong learning. The Study Visits Programme addresses those who are responsible for the development of education and vocational training policies at local, regional or national levels.

The priorities of the Study Visits programme are based on the priorities of education and training policy at both European level and within participating countries.

Applicants for the Study Visits programme may apply to take part in Study Visits that focus on general education, vocational education and training (VET) or lifelong learning.

The themes of the visits that took place from March 2008 until June 2010 were decided by the Lifelong Learning Committee to assure coherence and synergy with European policy developments in education and training as well as the Lisbon strategy and the Education and Training 2010 work programme.

There are nine broad categories of themes as follows:

- Key competences for all
- Improving access, equity, quality and efficiency in education and training
- Keeping teaching, training and leadership attractive
- Education and training for employability
- Implementation of common frameworks and instruments for lifelong learning
- Trends and developments in lifelong learning

- Development of learning communities, all actors in education and training
- Facilitating mobility in lifelong learning
- Other measures.

As a transversal programme, Study Visits offer an excellent opportunity for creating links with the sectoral programmes: Comenius, Erasmus, Grundtvig and Leonardo da Vinci. This can be done by:

- visiting local or regional projects of the sectoral programmes as appropriate in the Study Visits programme
- making outcomes of the Study Visits available to the managers of the sectoral programmes and other interested experts in general education, VET and lifelong learning
- finding partners for new projects during the Study Visits
- enabling partners from the sectoral programmes to participate in Study Visits.

The programme provides a forum for discussion, exchange and mutual learning on themes of common interest at EU level and serves the following objectives:

- provide those with educational and policy responsibilities at local, regional or national levels with increased understanding of specific aspects of education and vocational training policies and themes of common interest in other countries
- enable exchange of advice, ideas and information between all those taking part in the programme,
- enrich the flow of information between the participating countries, at European level, and at policy-making level.

2. General Statistics

This section examines the number of participants, the professional profile of participants and the choices of visit themes.

From March 2008 to June 2010 95 participants from Ireland took part in the Study Visits programme.

Participants included members of:

- the school inspectorate,
- school Principals from Primary and Secondary Schools,
- Special Education Needs Officers (SENOs),
- Special Education Support Service representatives,
- Curriculum Advisors,
- Project Leaders from the Modern Languages in Primary Schools Initiative (MLPSI),
- Principals from Colleges of Further Education,
- Heads of Departments from Colleges of Further Education, Universities and Institutes of Technology,
- Regional Development Officers from the Second Level Support Services,
- Education Officers from Development Companies and National Bodies,
- Directors of Education Centres,
- Representatives from Vocational Education Committees and the Irish Vocational Education Association including
 - Education Officers,
 - Heads of Departments and
 - Adult Education Officers,
- Directors and CEOs of Enterprise Boards,
- Teacher Trainers,
- representatives from the National Training Authority,
- Further Education Support Officers,

- Guidance Councillors and Psychologists from the National Educational Psychological Service,
- Company Training Managers,
- Programme Support Managers from Enterprise led Training Programmes,
- Social Partners,
- Voluntary organisations and
- members of National Steering Committees involved in quality assurance, curriculum advice, assessment and certification of qualifications.

Table 2 indicates the percentage of participants per theme of the visit. Note that the top four themes—equal opportunities for disadvantaged groups, developing entrepreneurship, language teaching and learning and quality assurance mechanisms in schools and training institutions—were attended in equal measure by representatives from school education, VET and lifelong learning sectors.

Table 2: indicates the percentage of participants per theme of the visit:

Theme	%	Host Countries ¹
Equal opportunities for disadvantaged groups	13%	TR, SE, LT, FI, SK, IT, DE, FR
Developing entrepreneurship	9%	SE, IT, FI, ES, NO, PT
Language teaching and learning	9%	PL, IT, NL, HU, CY, GB
Quality assurance mechanisms in schools and training institutions	9%	PL, DE, FI, EE, ES, NL
The teaching profession, challenges for teachers and trainers	6%	TR, DE, GB, ES
Use of ICT in learning	5%	CZ, ES, TR
Increasing adult participation in education and training	4%	FI, TR, NL
Measures to prevent early school leaving	4%	NO, ES, EE
Strengthening intercultural education	4%	IT, PT
Developing creativity in learning and teaching	3%	PL, IT
Implementation of flexible learning pathways	3%	SE
Increasing attractiveness of VET	3%	DE, MT, AT
Monitoring and evaluation of education and training	3%	IT, DE

¹ See the glossary at the end of the document to identify countries from these codes

Theme	%	Host Countries ¹
The pupils	3%	GB, ES
Leadership and management in schools and training providers	2%	CZ, GB
Lifelong guidance services	2%	IT, DK/SE,
Presentation of national systems of education and vocational training	2%	AT, GR
The role of parents and their participation in school life	2%	TR, DK
Role of higher education in vocational training	2%	FR
Integrating groups with particular difficulties on the labour market	2%	ES
Environmental education	2%	FR, PL
Cooperation between education and training institutions and local communities	1%	NO
Quality assurance systems, frameworks and approaches	1%	EE
Schools and communities roles to prevent violence	1%	RO
Use of EU programmes to increase cross border mobility	1%	DE
Validation of non-formal and informal learning	1%	PT
School management	1%	MT
The school	1%	IT
European dimension in education	1%	TR

3. Personal Objectives for Participating in the Study Visits Programme

The follow-up questionnaire, answered by 56% of the participants, examined the personal objectives for participating in the programme, the main objectives were as follows:

- increase understanding of the topic in a European context
- explore ideas that may impact on local, regional or national policy
- exchange and gain best practice from other European countries
- improve skills in the topic area and in turn upskill the organisation
- re-evaluate own practices and policies in the area

91% of respondents felt that the study visit met their objectives

2% of respondents felt that the objectives were somewhat met

7% of respondents felt that their objectives were not met at all

The main reason given for not achieving the objectives was that the visit did not match the catalogue description

4. Impact of the Study Visit on Continuous Professional Development

Based on Final Reports:

- **100%** of participants reported enhanced soft skills such as communication, critical thinking, networking, leadership and team working skills.
- **100%** of participants reported increased understanding of European education and training systems
- **96%** participants reported increased understanding of European policies in the topic of their visit choice
- **87%** of participants reported a broader perspective and understanding of their own work in a European context.
- **82%** of participants reported critical analysis and re-evaluation of their own work.

The main enhanced skills and areas are as follows:

- knowledge of other European education and VET systems
- new insights and ideas from discussions and meetings
- knowledge and know-how into how to implement ideas
- increased awareness and understanding of European Policy and policies across Europe
- motivation to explore how Ireland can benefit from practices and polices implemented in other European countries
- awareness of resources that could provide European initiatives in education and training
- awareness of good quality innovations that could be considered in Ireland

Personal and Professional Impact based on Follow-up Questionnaires:

The follow-up questionnaire provided participants with a tick box list of aspects for personal and professional continuous professional development and the results are in Table 3.

Table 3: Personal and Professional Impact

	Contributed greatly	Somewhat	Not at all	Not applicable
Increased understanding of policy areas in other European countries	98%	2%		
Increased understanding of national and/or European policy in relation to the topic of the visit	98%	2%		
Increased understanding of practices in other European countries	95%	5%		
Networking with new colleagues	95%	5%		
Reflective Skills	71%	22%	5%	2%
Practice Guidelines	60%	20%		20%
Report Writing Skills	54%	49%	2%	3%
New Methodologies	50%	45%		5%
Presentation Skills	48%	34%		18%
Communication Skills	47%	53%		
Team Working Skills	44%	66%		
Assessment Techniques	33%	48%	6%	13%
Research Material	20%	23%	4%	53%
Data Collection	8%	20%	2%	70%

5. Impact Per Thematic Area Based on Final Reports

This section examines the impact of the top four thematic areas as illustrated in Table 2.

Theme	%
Equal opportunities for disadvantaged groups	13%
Developing entrepreneurship	9%
Language teaching and learning	9%
Quality assurance mechanisms in schools and training institutions	9%

The following should also be noted:

- **94%** of all participants specified that they found the study visit beneficial to their organisation and own work
- **89%** of all participants indicated that they will implement particular methodologies, projects and examples of good practice seen on their visits into their own work
- Final reports are due within a month of the visit ending and within this month **42%** of participants had begun or were in the process of implementing the knowledge gained into their own organisations.
- **6%** of participants indicated that study visit would not directly impact on their organisation but has enhanced their own knowledge and skills in the area

Theme: Equal Opportunities for Disadvantaged Groups:

As illustrated, 13% of participants in the programme attended Study Visits under this topic. These visits were proposed under the theme of improving access, equity, quality and efficiency in education and training. The visits focused on equal opportunities for disadvantaged groups focusing on developing and implementing measures to improve access to education and training for disadvantaged groups and designing and carrying out activities to achieve equity. Key topics in this area were drop outs, social inclusion, adult learning, special needs and education and training attainment.

Many participants in this topic have implemented ideas into their organisations. For example:

- The Aim High Project focuses on students with no male role models and provides mentoring for and reintegration of at-risk students back into education.
- A virtual learning environment for schools in isolated rural communities and for some students who cannot attend school on a regular basis is in the process of being developed by a school principal.
- The Big Lunch, where staff and students of the local education and training institutions, community groups and members of the local community all meet together to lessen mistrust, break down barriers and stereotypes leading to inclusive community activities.
- A Step-by-Step project will be adapted to suit the needs of the training institution to aid the integration of learners with special needs.
- A number of training institutions intend to offer more flexibility in the provision of education and training to allow a more inclusive learning environment.

There is a renewed appreciation of the role of the school/training institution and its relationship with the local community and this focus will be incorporated into the participants' own organisations.

Another factor highlighted by participants was the need for strong communication between primary and secondary schools with regard to student records, behavioural and learning difficulties and absenteeism.

As well as new ideas, participants report that they will change their teaching methodologies and re-evaluate their own institutions in the areas of social inclusion policies and plans. Both external and internal evaluation are important and a number of participants will adapt their own strategic plans to be more inclusive of a self-evaluation component, which will also involve students and trainees with evaluation methods.

There is an emphasis on student involvement with a student-based approach where students have responsibility and an active role in planning their learning, interacting with teachers and other students, researching and assessing. Students are required to make choices about how to and what to learn. There is an emphasis on integrating learning across the curriculum and an emphasis on enquiry type activities, where the teacher acts as a guide, mentor and facilitator of learning. A greater flexibility in learning and teaching and a greater flexibility in assessment with self and peer assessment is becoming more common with a long-term perspective and emphasis on lifelong learning.

Theme: Developing Entrepreneurship:

9% of participants attended visits under the topic of developing entrepreneurship. These visits were proposed under the themes of key competences and education and training for employability.

Participants reported that entrepreneurship across Europe, particularly in Norway and Portugal, is encouraged at a very early age. It is never too early to introduce concepts of entrepreneurship and innovation into the education system. In Norway the teaching of enterprise begins at five years of age and can be used to meet the needs of students who do not respond to traditional methods of teaching.

Participants reported that entrepreneurship education requires the active involvement of all actors in education and training, local community and businesses in the design, delivery and integration of entrepreneurship into the education and training curriculum. Entrepreneurship should not be a standalone topic or a one-off module but should be intrinsically embedded into the curriculum. There is a need to increase the number of entrepreneurship teachers/trainers and to provide training in interactive teaching methods. Entrepreneurship education develops creativity, problem-solving and leadership skills.

Aspects under the theme which have already been implemented include the introduction of a collaborative approach to the promotion and development of entrepreneurship. For example, a collaboration between a local Institute of Technology and a County enterprise board has resulted in a new programme for owners and managers in the area of entrepreneurship; this involves hosting entrepreneurial seminars in conjunction with the local Institute of Technology as a means of promoting self-employment as a career opportunity.

Another participant is currently researching and compiling a cross-curricular teacher training module in enterprise education focusing on creativity and innovation for students and teachers. The module will subsequently be proposed to the relevant training authorities.

The links and interactions between education providers and local businesses presented many participants with new ideas to propose to local businesses within their communities. Many participants have cited that the concept of entrepreneurship is commonly misunderstood and entrepreneurship need not only result in job creation; it can be used as a means to enhance life skills such as innovation thinking and openness to new ideas.

Many participants—in both general education and VET—will introduce action learning projects in the area of entrepreneurship to improve creativity and innovation.

Participants also noted the lack of evaluation in the area of how learning strategies influence the development of entrepreneurial competences and how these competences transfer into new projects. A comprehensive evaluation strategy should be developed to examine and provide a comparative analysis with other European countries.

Theme: Language Teaching and Learning

Nine percent of participants took part in Study Visits under the theme of language teaching and learning, which falls under the theme of key competences for all.

The majority of applicants cite their choosing visits under this topic as being due to the absence of an explicit foreign language policy within Ireland and also due to the increasing number of students whose mother tongue is neither English nor Irish. It is also noted that foreign language learning is not compulsory throughout education and training systems in Ireland.

Many language learning projects and techniques have been adapted and transferred to participants' own context: for example, games played through the foreign language or classes such as cookery have been delivered through the target language. Participants have noted the active learning techniques applied in some of the other European countries and have incorporated them into their classes. Participants also stated that a more strategic approach to the inclusion of cultural expression and understanding is required in the teaching of languages.

The majority of participants suggested compulsory foreign language learning within Irish schools as well as a language learning policy.

Participants noted that greater use of Content and Language Integrated Learning (CLIL) would add more diversity to the range of methodologies employed and contribute to the solution of the time challenge faced by many educational institutions where there are too many subjects and too little time. Therefore the use of CLIL would make language learning more effective.

Participants also noted the importance of introducing a statutory pre-service module in primary modern language teaching to ensure the competence of the future teacher. Investment in ICT and language learning software to cater for the range of learners in language classes and to enhance motivation is important. Participants believed that the use of ICT in language learning is a valuable resource and teacher training should also be provided in the area of ICT.

Blended language learning initiatives were cited by a number of participants to increase motivation and the learning experience for students as well as the teacher.

Participants involved in teaching English as a second language suggested that little use is made of the European Language Portfolio (ELP) particularly as a way of getting students to be active learners and making them aware of the gains they have made in the acquisition of a second language.

Theme: Quality Assurance Mechanisms in Schools and Training institutions

Nine percent of participants attend visits under this topic which falls under the theme of improving access, equity, quality and efficiency in education and training and the theme of education and training for employability.

In the area of quality assurance mechanisms, participants agreed that examples of good practice must be further adapted to suit the Irish context as quality assurance systems can be rooted in academic history and culture. All agreed that flexibility is required in the implementation of quality assurance plans, internal and external evaluations and the delivery of courses.

The development of self-evaluation as a key tool for continuous improvement and quality assurance of schools and colleges was a central aspect cited by many participants. Schools must follow the common criteria based on the European Quality Assurance Framework (EQFM). Educational advisors do not evaluate on outcome levels but on how schools and colleges identify and implement their own objectives, advisors pay special attention to the school's or college's own objectives and how these have been agreed within the wider community.

Participants cited that the development of internal evaluation tools such as lessons, observation and reporting tools, would have significant benefit for Irish schools at any level. Participants felt that the observation of teaching by peers relies more on the observers' perception of what good teaching leading to subjective reports. The development of a simple but comprehensive checklist or observation tool could assist teachers and schools to improve the quality of delivery and would be important in creating or fostering a culture and environment for self-improvement and reflective practice.

Participants also examined the importance of student involvement in the development of quality assurance mechanisms with regard to curriculum development.

A number of participants were interested in the fact that in some European countries Adult Education Specialists can assess Recognition of Prior Learning (RPL) and provide vocational qualifications.

In some European countries it is obligatory to publish school plans and in other European countries some schools voluntarily publish their plans. The plans are time-bound with credible targets for improvement and sets achievements over a three to four year period. The plan is published to all stakeholders and was perceived by participants as a good model to ensure openness of operation of a school and in the quality assurance process

A number of participants identified the common theme of the difficulty in recruiting and maintaining good leaders. Fewer people are applying for leadership positions. Training needs to be provided on a formal, modular level as happens in a number of places; for example, Scotland has developed a modular programme and an emotional test for leadership.

In a number of countries both business and labour unions are involved in the design, delivery and assessment of all VET programmes and this ensures that the knowledge, skills and competences acquired are relevant to the needs of the workplace. Course curricula are constantly reviewed to take account of the changing needs of the workplace.

Transferable Aspects Based on Follow-Up Questionnaires:

Of the participants who completed the follow-up questionnaire (56% of the total):

- **92%** of these have implemented some of the learning acquired on the visits into their organisations and their everyday work
- **90%** have indicated that the findings from the Study Visit are valuable inputs into work
- **87%** of respondents have indicated that they have adapted measures and knowledge gained on the visit to suit their own organisations

Conclusions of thematic areas

The overriding conclusion that emerges from participation in Study Visits focusing on the above four themes is that a holistic approach is required: regardless of the issues or topics, problems cannot be dealt with in isolation.

A **collaborative learning approach** is required promoting interdependence, giving learners responsibility for their own learning as well as providing individual accountability, as well as promoting interactions. This increases motivation for the teacher or trainer as well as the learner. There is a shared responsibility between the teacher and learner in setting the agenda, sourcing learning materials, and for evaluating the teaching and learning.

Student involvement regardless of age should be a key feature in any form of education and training organisation. Participants have reflected on the idea of their own student participation and have examined if the students have been given a token involvement role within their organisations. Real student involvement will enhance student learning and participation in education and training, thus

providing a sense of ownership and belonging within the school or institute. It also gives the schools and training organisations new perspectives. This creates positive and productive learning and teaching environments and prepares students to be active citizens.

The involvement of the local community and **partnership in education and training** is another key factor that appeared in final reports. Many participants cited that they would form local partnerships to help improve the learning, training and teaching within their institutions and schools. This would help with resources and allow greater flexibility in the delivery of education and training courses. Increased communication between local service providers and closer working relationships will help address problems and issues at local level which cannot be solved in isolation.

The development of **evaluation plans** also comes to the fore within the participants' reports. Evaluating both quantitative and qualitative information is important. The Study Visits have provided a clearer understanding on how to implement evaluation techniques. Evaluation should be ongoing from the initial planning process to the end of the activity. 48% of participants have indicated that they will be introducing new planning and evaluation techniques within their organisations. This will help with the improvement of education and training provision for both the learner and trainer or teacher.

6. Policy Impact

Based on final reports:

- 65% of participants cited that their visits were chosen due to national policy developments
- 89% of participants work directly in the area of the theme/topic and can impact on local, regional or national policy directly

Based on Follow Up Questionnaires:

- 88% of respondents have indicated that participation in the Study Visits programme has impacted on policy at local, national or regional level.

7. Follow up, sustainability and dissemination of results

Based on Final Reports:

- **100%** of participants shared the knowledge gained on the visit with their colleagues, management teams and networks
- **98%** of participants intended to keep in contact with the other participants on the visit for continued exchange of information and to keep up to date on developments in relation to the topic
- **92%** of participants shared the knowledge gained on the visit outside their own organisations
- **89%** of participants indicated that they will implement particular methodologies, projects and examples of good practice seen on their visits into their own work.
- **78%** of participants indicated the possibility of a Comenius, Grundtvig, etwinning or Leonardo da Vinci project, student exchanges or job shadowing as a result of the visit
- **63%** of participants have set up some web platform to maintain communication and share documentation

Apart from sharing information with colleagues and implementing particular aspects of the visits into their own work, organisation and impacting on policy, the following are the other main methods of dissemination:

- websites
- articles in newsletters
- reports for management teams, steering committees and networks
- present findings at conferences
- community and voluntary work

Based on Follow Up Questionnaire:

- **100%** of respondents shared information with colleagues
- **95%** of respondents shared the information gained outside their own organisations
- **80%** of respondents have implemented particular methodologies, projects and examples of good practice seen on their visits into their own work
- **65%** of respondents intend joining a Comenius, Grundtvig, etwinning or Leonardo da Vinci project, student exchanges or job shadowing as a result of the visit

8. General Comments about the Study Visits programme

Based on Final Reports:

90% of participants were satisfied with the programme and participants found that the study visit:

- provided valuable networking opportunities
- was well planned
- was very informative
- was very worthwhile in education and training terms
- had an invaluable impact on continuous professional development
- provided an excellent opportunity to examine practices elsewhere in Europe in a structured targeted way

The main problems encountered in participating in the programme were:

- lack of time for discussion
- very intensive programmes
- hosts slow in providing information
- some participants in the group had no background on the topic
- some participants had inadequate language levels to participate and held the group back during discussions and visits
- 3% of the participants said that their Study Visit did not match the description in the catalogue
- 1% of the Study Visits were joined by another group visiting the organisation
- 3% found the groups to be too large

- 2% found the groups to be too small

Further suggestions for the programme were:

- the possibility of funding a follow-up meeting with the group two years after a visit
- A platform for sharing documentation should be provided to allow continued exchange
- A synthesis report should be written by the National Agency at the end of each year and circulated to all Irish participants to increase the sharing of knowledge
- A follow up meeting with all Irish participants to share information should be organised

9. Conclusions

The aim of this report is to examine the impact of the Study Visits programme in Ireland in line with the objectives of the programme outlined in section 1.

Participants

The 95 participants in the Study Visits Programme from March 2008 to June 2010 represented a wide variety of education and training specialists. The gap between the numbers of those involved in general education and those involved in vocational education and training, lifelong learning and social partners is narrowing. Léargas has aimed to address this in calls for applications and devised new promotional plans to increase the variety and backgrounds of those applying to participate in the programme. This has proved successful so far and even more so with the introduction of two deadlines for the 2010 call for applications.

Themes

The top four themes of the visits in which people take part are:

- equal opportunities for disadvantaged groups,
- developing entrepreneurship,
- language teaching and learning
- quality assurance in schools and training institutions.

These reflect themes that are high on the agenda at national level, a fact that is further reflected in the final reports where 65% of respondents state that they chose their visits as a result of national policy developments.

Personal Objectives

Participants' personal objectives for taking part in the programme are clear and are linked the aims and objectives of the programme. Participants sought to:

- increase their understanding of the topic,
- explore ideas that may impact on policy,
- exchange and gain best practice,
- upskill in a topic and to
- re-evaluate own practices.

Ninety-one percent of respondents felt that the programme met their objectives. Note that this question appears only on the follow-up questionnaire which was answered by 56% of participants. The National Agency will examine the possibility of including this question in the final reports for the 2011 call as it would be interesting to examine how many of participants' objectives are met.

Continuous Professional Development

With regard to the impact of the programme on the continuous professional development (CPD) of participants, 100% of participants report a positive impact. The impact includes knowledge gained as well as invaluable soft skills such as communication skills, interpersonal skills and the ability to critically reflect on own practices.

The follow-up questionnaire—which was completed by 56% of the participants—cites that 98% of respondents gained increased understanding of policy areas in other European countries and increased understanding of National and/or European policy. In addition, 95% gained an understanding of practices in other European countries as well as networking with other European colleagues.

Both the final reports and the follow-up questionnaires demonstrate a positive impact on CPD both in the area of skills and knowledge.

Transferability

The report examines the top four thematic areas and looks at ideas and initiatives that could be transferred to participants' own work and organisation:

- 94% of all participants reported a positive impact of the programme on their own work and organisation and
- 89% indicated that they will implement methodologies, projects and examples of good practice into their own work.
- at final report stage, a month after the visit, 42% of participants had begun to implement aspects of their visit into their organisations.

The implementation of ideas and methodologies demonstrates the sustainable and transferable aspects of the programme for participants. It would be interesting to follow up on the implemented ideas and practices to examine how they worked and see if they are ongoing after some time.

Impact

Section 5 examines the impact of the top four thematic areas. Common ideas found through all four thematic areas are the need for a holistic approach to all problems, collaborative learning approaches, student involvement, partnerships in education and training and evaluation plans. These topics are a high priority at European level and are reflected in the descriptions of the themes of the visits.

Networking and Dissemination

Based on final reports, 98% of participants intend to keep in contact with other participants and 63% of participants have set up a web platform to keep in contact. This shows that the networking with European colleagues is working well and further

strengthened by the fact that 78% of participants indicated the possibility of participating in another Lifelong Learning Programme opportunity as a result of the study visit.

All participants share information within their own organisation and 92% of participants have shared the information gained outside their own organisations. The National Agency highlights the importance of communicating widely the information gained on the visits and has devised a guide to dissemination and exploitation of results for all study visit participants.

With regard to further suggestions for the programme, the National Agency held a dissemination and knowledge sharing seminar in September 2010 to allow participants share information gained on their visits with colleagues in Ireland.

The National Agency will examine the possibility of producing a synthesis report at the end of each study visit year to try and increase the knowledge sharing.

The possibility of a platform for sharing documentation will be examined. At briefing meetings for outgoing participants, the National Agency provides information on web platforms and information on free websites for sharing documentation.

The possibility of funding for a follow-up meeting with the groups two years after the visit will be included in the next report to the Commission. It should be noted that Cedefop do host knowledge-sharing seminars as well as synthesis seminars on particular topics on an annual basis giving participants the opportunity to further share and provide information on follow up to visits.

Meeting Objectives

The Study Visits programme is meeting its objectives in Ireland, particularly in the areas of increased understanding of specific aspects of the education and training systems and policies, the exchange of information and networking opportunities. Participants have made contacts for further research or possible partnerships for future projects. The programme has allowed for reflection and critical analysis of participants' own organisations and areas of work. Participants are sharing the information gained on their visits and transfer aspects back to their own organisations. This is also reflected in the satisfaction levels of participants in the programme.

Glossary:

Countries in Table 1:

AT: Austria
CY: Cyprus
CZ: Czech Republic
DE: Germany
DK: Denmark
EE: Estonia
ES: Spain
FI: Finland
FR: France
GB: United Kingdom
GR: Greece
HU: Hungary
IT: Italy
LT: Lithuania
MT: Malta
NL: Netherlands
NO: Norway
PL: Poland
PT: Portugal
RO: Romania
SE: Sweden
SK: Slovakia
TR: Turkey

List of Abbreviations:

Cedefop: The European Centre for the Development of Vocational Training

Cedefop- the European Centre for the Development of Vocational Training, established in 1975 - is a European agency that helps promote and develop vocational education and training in the European Union (EU). It is the EU's reference centre for vocational education and training.

Cedefop was one of the first specialised and decentralised agencies set up to provide scientific and technical know-how in specific fields and promote exchanges of ideas between different European partners.

Originally based in Berlin, in 1995 Cedefop's head office was transferred to Thessaloniki. Cedefop has a liaison office in Brussels.

'Cedefop' is the French acronym of the organisation's official title, European Centre for the Development of Vocational Training (**C**entre **E**uropéen pour le **D**éveloppement de la **F**ormation **P**rofessionnelle).

www.cedefop.europa.eu

CEO: Chief Executive Officer

CLIL: Content and Language Integrated Learning
CLIL is a dual-focused educational approach in which an additional language is used for the learning and teaching of content and language with the objective of promoting

both content and language mastery to pre-defined levels (Maljers, Marsh, Wolff, Genesee, Frigols-Martín, Mehisto, 2010)

www.ecml.at

CPD: Continuous Professional Development
 "CPD is any process or activity of a planned nature, that provides added value to the capability of the professional through the increase in knowledge skills and personal qualities necessary for the execution of professional and technical duties, often termed competence. It is a life-long tool that benefits the professional, client, employer, professional association and society as a whole."
 Professional Associations Research Network.)

KA1: Key Activity 1 –Policy Cooperation and Innovation in Lifelong Learning

The Key Activity of Policy cooperation and innovation in Lifelong learning is supporting policy development and cooperation, notably in the context of the Lisbon process and the Education and Training 2010 work programme, as well as the Bologna and Copenhagen processes and their successors.

Its objectives are to achieve comparative analyses of educational systems in the EU, with a view to ensuring an adequate supply of comparable data, statistics and analysis to underpin lifelong learning policy development, as well as to monitor progress towards objectives and targets in lifelong learning and to identify areas requiring particular attention.

This activity has a transversal approach, covering a large range of topics and actions at different levels of education and training. These actions include, for example, support for thematic networks of experts or institutions, mobility of individuals, studies, and support for specific institutions active in the field of Lifelong Learning.

http://eacea.ec.europa.eu/llp/ka1/policy_cooperation_innovation_en.php

LLP: Lifelong Learning Programme

As the flagship European Funding programme in the field of education and training, the Lifelong Learning Programme (LLP) enables individuals at all stages of their lives to pursue stimulating learning opportunities across Europe. It is an umbrella programme integrating various educational and training initiatives. LLP is divided in four sectorial sub programmes and four so called 'transversal' programmes.

http://eacea.ec.europa.eu/llp/about_llp/about_llp_en.php

MLPSI: Modern Languages in Primary Schools Initiative
www.mlpsi.ie

NA: National Agency
 The organisation responsible for the management of the Lifelong Learning Programme in each participating country, in Ireland this is Leargas
www.leargas.ie

SENO: Special Education Needs Officer

VET: Vocational Education and Training
Vocational education and training in Ireland is seen both in policy and structural terms as being one of the main pillars essential to the building and maintenance of a highly skilled work force operating within a knowledge society.
<http://www.fas.ie/en/pubdocs/DescriptionVocationalEducationTraining.pdf>
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