

## LEADERSHIP AND MANAGEMENT IN VOCATIONAL AND EDUCATION TRAINING<sup>1</sup>

**SILVIA IRIMIEA<sup>2</sup>**

The CEDEFOP (The European Centre for the Development of Vocational Training) organises annually an impressive number of study visits which seek to increase the expertise of VET trainers and experts in various areas. The purpose of a study visit is to generate an exchange of experience and good practice between the country you visit and the countries the participants come from. Thus, participating in a study visit can be an exciting experience and an important learning tool.

“Leadership and management in VET” is such a program which brought together 17 decision-makers from 13 European countries for the purposes of learning more about the Finnish VET system, about other VET systems, exchanging views on how to meet the challenges of an efficient leadership in the changing world of a Europe under recession. The study visit took place during 23-28 April 2012 and was hosted by the Centre for International Mobility (CIMO), Helsinki, Finland. The Centre for Tourism Training of the Faculty of Geography, Babes-Bolyai University participated in the study visit program.

The topics discussed centered around the following topics: VET leadership, the Finnish Consortium approach to strategy and competence management, VET teacher training, forecasting skills needs, leading diversity – focus on the individual student.

The participants identified some *commonalities*, which can be summarised in the following issues:

- all countries agreed that developing the quality of leadership in VET is key to facing the challenges in a changing environment;
- differences are usually manifest in varying cultural backgrounds and levels of regulation;
- individualization & inclusive education are policies in most EU member states but the practice and operational implementation is at varying levels and presents similar challenges for a number of states;
- it is interesting to have seen the focus (and new reality) on VET in Finland, where more than half of the students are opting for VET education, a phenomenon which does not characterise many other EU countries;
- the close cooperative relationship in Finland between the Trade Union for teachers and the Ministry is quite unique, it helps the system to develop and introduces changes in this country;
- member states across the EU have a similar framework for a national curriculum to provide education for students from primary to doctoral level;

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<sup>1</sup> Report on a CEDEFOP Study Visit.

<sup>2</sup> Babes-Bolyai University, Faculty of Geography, Center for Tourism Training, 400006 Cluj-Napoca, Romania

- individualization & inclusive education are policies in most EU member states but the practice and operational implementation is at varying levels and presents similar challenges for a number of states;

- a good example of sharing of teaching tools for adult education is carried out in France;

- quality assurance both now and in the future is seen as a pre-requisite for success in the long term delivery of appropriate vocational training;

- training for teachers and leaders is vital to the ongoing development of the profession (initial and Continuing Professional Development);

- leadership & Management training is generally available in each country although the design and delivery varies;

- reductions in funding were cited as a common concern both in the immediate past and expected further cuts in the near future;

- there was a common discussion as to whether leaders must, have been, or, are, teachers. If a teacher was also a good leader this was the best option;

- managerial and leadership knowledge and skills must be provided before or during a person's career in order to become an effective leader. In addition, a leader must also have ongoing continuing professional development to be effective and a true reflective professional;

- cooperation and continually developing links with employers was seen as vital to organisational effectiveness.

*The differences* between the participating institutions were grouped in the following items:

- differences are usually manifested in varying influence of cultural backgrounds on leadership styles. An additional influence was the varying levels of regulation and state direction that would sometimes allow leaders the strategic freedom whilst others were more constrained by regulation;

- several organisations differed as to whether a leader must also have teaching experience or a teaching qualification in order to be permitted the post, to have professional credibility or become fully effective. However, others felt the leader needed an awareness of pedagogy but not experience or expertise. This was a constant source of discussion;

- the overall strategic direction of each organization was defined by varying local and national levels of influence. For example some organisations had quite complex boards and structures that reflected local and municipal influence whilst others had a more internalised formation with less external influence;

- Finland had an expectation that degree level study would be followed automatically in most cases by a Masters whereas in some countries there is no such expectation or a degree of separation;

- there was an aspiration for all leaders to have some form of qualification but in some countries (e.g. Germany) a qualification was required even before an application could be made whereas in other countries (e.g. UK) no prior qualification was compulsory. Frequently, the differences within colleges and similar organisations – but not within commercial providers;

- suitable levels of quality assurance processes to ensure effective delivery of qualifications were not always evident or were only in the course of development. This was focused on provision but innately reflected the management effectiveness in running the organization.

The *challenges* faced by the representatives of the participating countries were summarized in the following issues:

- the future skills which will be needed by the labour market must be anticipated;
- the entire education system has to be very innovative and knowledge must be acquired from all parts of society;
- practitioners have to find a method to identify, on the one hand, what studies are the right ones for students and on the other hand, what will keep them in training until the end;
- the resource availability i.e. numbers of teachers, students (eg minimum number to form a group/class), lack of Government funding, inflexible systems and the attitude of teachers who often do not want to embrace new teaching responsibilities must be overcome;
- the adoption of the European Credit System and the transferability of credits must become common practices;
- the members of the training community need to understand which ideas can be implemented given the policy and cultural barriers;
- trainers must engage with minority groups;
- trainers must find adequate ways how best to engage with employers;
- VET trainers must understand what is meant by *quality* in a changing learning paradigm and how teachers may best proactively approach this situation in an economic environment where sources of funding are under pressure;
- for leaders and managers it seems difficult to properly organise continued training for VET teachers that is specific to the teaching of professions. We did see a good practice at the Haagen school and an extensive report by the Finnish National Board of Education endeavouring to understand the specifics of this. It is evident that there are large differences between countries regarding this issue;
- leadership issues appear to be the same everywhere but the manner that they can be addressed is widely different in different national systems;
- the systems of funding and the distribution of authority on education determines the ability to act effectively. This could mean that the transfer of good practices has to be monitored carefully to prevent disappointment;
- an area that is similar in VET in all countries is the *connection to companies*. The problems seem to be the same: how to interest and engage companies in VET training in cooperation with schools;
- an idea might be to encourage member states to develop their own 'best approach' as opposed to the EU setting out a 'one way' for all. The best approach might also be to consider a 'regional approach'.

At the end of the visit, the group suggested that:

- more activity between VET teachers and leaders at European level should be encouraged, for example by CEDEFOP and fund policy leaders. Vocational educational leaders need to support each other because vocational education is an important part of improving social mobility;
- there is a need to have specific support and groups for VET, as there are many for other groups such as "schools" but less so for VET providers, in particular. VET is different, has specific challenges and much to offer to learners, employers and the community, in general. The support should come from policy makers, industry bodies, employers and stakeholders;

- sharing IT and integrated Management Information Systems(MIS) would be instrumental in VET. This information would be useful to admissions managers, leaders in VET in general and possibly software developers in host countries;

- the importance for VET specific continuing professional development (CPD) to ensure relevant, timely and useful support should be given to VET leaders. This would be most useful in focussing on future trends and developments to ensure change or initiatives can be developed in time to meet the objectives. This would be best aimed at policy makers and providers to highlight the needs and wide opportunities that exist which may go unappreciated.

## CONCLUSION

The development of Study Visit programmes has become extremely important in the European context as it allows trainers, teachers and, more recently, leaders or decision-makers to participate proactively in an exchange programme which is sought to continue the Copenhagen reform and the Europe 2020 Strategy. The programme is based on the EC education-regulated policy on VET, which is intended to make the link between the quality of education and the quality of teachers or trainers and the quality of leaders more visible and efficient for the learner.

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