

Opening introduction

By Michel Feutrie, USTL

Why this project?

This project is an answer to the call for proposals launched by the European Commission by July 2001, «Joint Actions». The objective of this call was to set up innovative approaches to establishing transversal procedures between different types of training and learning programmes, at different levels, offering several types of partnership.

We decided to submit a proposal on the first strand: to build a system of transfer and accumulation of learning credits for lifelong learning. This involves a system that must integrate formal, non-formal and informal learning and includes arrangements for recognition, which are not necessarily part of the current system of qualification.

What was the content of our proposal?

On this basis, we have defined six main objectives for our project.

- 1. To continue and strengthen the reflection on the new developments, on the problematic introduced by the European Commission.*

There are a number of issues, which underlie key words such as:

- Transfer between institutions, sectors, countries.
- Accumulation, individualised professional pathways.
- Integration of formal, non-formal, informal learning, consideration of those ways of learning not as separated spheres but as part of an integrated process.
- Methodological principles: how to identify, make explicit for individuals and visible for training institutions or employers, evaluate those different ways of learning.
- Credits.

- 2. To assemble, describe and analyse the most important and relevant experiences in the Socrates, Leonardo and Youth programmes*

We were sure that a number of projects in recent years in these different fields, both at national and European level, attempted:

- To address the question of identification, evaluation and recognition of non-formal and informal learning.
- To establish transversal approaches.
- To build tools.

Our intention was therefore to begin with existing experience

3. *To investigate the expectation and needs in relation to an integrated and generalised approach to recognition, accumulation and transfer.*

The analysis that we have done, that has been done by experts, of the ways by which the European countries address these issues, show great diversity. The question of the recognition and valuing of formal, non-formal and informal learning, and more the question of an integrated approach to these different ways of learning, is currently firmly rooted in “national cultures”, which define the relationships between learning and work. For example the study done by CEDEFOP identifies five main models in Europe the Southern one, the German one, the Scandinavian one, the British one and French-Belgian one.

We can discuss this, but we are sure that we cannot address these issues without:

- Political decision makers.
- Administrators.
- Social partners: professional associations and trade unions, and enterprises.
- Training and learning institutions.

And without taking account of regulations and legislation.

It is also complicated by the fact that this issue of recognition and of integration is a question in strong current debate in each country.

But perhaps we can hope that the European dimension will help to overcome national obstacles on this.

4. *To evaluate the feasibility of an experimental set of procedures*

In particular:

- To investigate the problems and obstacles that might be encountered in implementing such a system.
- To locate the sources of potential resistance.
- To understand to reasons of resistance.
- To identify the conditions for acceptance of such an approach.
- To identify for each country the best way to set up “systems”.

5. *To create, develop and propose the principles, methods and necessary conditions for the implementation of an experimental set of arrangements*

6. *To construct a specification for future pilot projects in this field*

On this basis we have built a partnership involving, in what we have called an inner circle, 5 European networks :

- EUCEN, the lead partner, covering the field of continuing education in Universities;
- EAEA, covering the field of lifelong learning in associations
- FIEEA for Youth

- AEFP for vocational education
- And SEFI for engineering schools

An outer circle completes the partnership, it involves other networks or institutions concerned with the theme and a range of experts...

The project is undertaken in 3 phases:

1. A review of information available on the theme (started in May 2002, finishing now)

The objective was first to collect a maximum of documents, reports, studies commissioned by the EC, analysis available on a European scale and then to analyse them. This covers the two first objectives. That is where we are today and in a few minutes Pat Davies will give you an overview of the results of that analysis.

2. Second step: analysis of needs (November 2002 to March 2003)

Starting from the analysis done and from the results of this seminar, we shall start in a few days the second step in order to seek to achieve the objectives 3 and 4.

We will choose five countries offering a diversity of characteristics and situations representative in Europe. Why five? It is simply because we have not enough money to work with all the countries of Europe.

In these five countries we expect to have three types of activities:

- Meetings with the key players: political decision makers, institutional managers, experts, social partners, training organisations or associations to identify their expectations, remarks, positions in relation to a wider system for recognition of learning and competences that goes beyond the existing arrangements and might operate at European level, for example concerning France the new legislation concerning accreditation of experience and the creation of a national list of qualification, involving all qualifications.
- Discussions with these actors to identify the resistance, the obstacles, the problems in order to define the feasibility of the project and the minimum conditions for putting it in place and to identify how to meet the needs of the population, specially those who are excluded or are afraid to participate.
- Analysis of legislation and regulation surrounding the systems of certification and qualifications, the accreditation of experiential learning and form of recognition at work.

The basic question will be: is it possible to define a sort of “common currency” as claimed by the EC? If yes, on what basis? With whom?... If not, is there an alternative? What conditions would have to be met before it would be possible to create a European system?

This phase is particularly sensitive for the project. At the end we will organise a second seminar in Lille.

3. The third phase will address objectives 5 and 6 of the project. It will consist mainly of proposals and recommendations for the future (April-July 2003)

It will consist of:

- An analysis of the data collected in phase 1 and 2.
- Proposals for an architecture for a new integrated system.
- The process by which this may be achieved.
- A set of methods and tools to implement it.
- A specification for pilot projects to test it.

That is what we shall try to do, I am not sure that we will be able to do all that on a so short time. But I think that we will be able to draw a general framework and list recommendations.

At the end of the project there will be a conference in Brno – you will find the announcement in your pack, and please let us know if you want further copies to send to others who should be invited.

In conclusion

My view is that Transfine is now involved in a sort of “maelstrom” initiated by the EC through the question of transparency of qualifications and we are explicitly invited to bring our contribution to the debate. This project is regularly quoted in the EC documents or presentations, speakers and writers explaining what will be our results so your input today is important.

Three main objectives emerge from EC orientations:

- To develop common reference levels, common principles for certification, and common measures, including a credit transfer system for vocational education and training.
- To develop mutual recognition of qualifications at sectoral levels.
- To develop a set of common principles regarding validation of non-formal and informal learning, to ensure greater compatibility between approaches in different countries.

They give us an indication of the framework proposed by the EC and currently being discussed with Member States, but I think that we have also to work independently and try to promote a model that is workable and acceptable to the field.

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