



Regions in Action to Sustain and Develop Learning Mobility in VET

A joint position paper FREREF – EARLALL

Some facts

It is well admitted that two major factors influence positively the access to employment for people in VET

- the use of alternate periods of learning in "school" (or training centre, including high school, college and university) and learning at workplace (*we will call this way of learning "apprenticeship"*; it covers all kinds of alternate learning (e.g., one week in "school", one week at work; three weeks in "school", up to six months in "school", six months at work, and any other kind of combination);
- the possibility to move to a foreign country (or several) to achieve part of this learning, and if possible, not only the "school" part, but also the "workplace" part; here, we are dealing with mobility related to the learning program, theoretical and practical; we are not considering mobility that would be only devoted to language learning, but rather mobility related to learning about a job (theoretical side and practical side) as it is intended in VET.

Combining apprenticeship and mobility is not simple, because of several hampering factors

- the time to move:
 - the simplest thing is to move between two training centres, because it can be chosen to fit the program on both sides;
 - another thing is to move for a "simple" internship in a company abroad, not connected with the apprenticeship mode (during summer holidays for example);
- the duration of the mobility:
 - the easiest is short mobility (one or two weeks), which does not disturb too much the programme at home, is less stressful for young people, and easier to organise on the receiving part;
 - at the other end of the scale, a full year programme abroad (or a semester for those having learning years organised in semesters) is also rather easy to handle, though costlier for the person moving;
 - very interesting is the possibility to move long enough to catch up the spirit of the receiving context (school + company) without disorganising the whole learning programme of the year; i.e. one month or one month and a half for example, with a given level of alternate programme;
- the question of the work contract and the salary:
 - this issue is different from country to country;
 - the status of the apprentice is different;
 - the legal status of the working time is different (responsibility, insurances, etc.);
 - the salary (amount, taxes, etc.) is different;
 - etc.
- the mutual recognition of studies, qualifications and experience via credits or certificates:

ECTS credits are very useful regarding the theoretical part of the programme, but very few is available regarding the recognition of the learning acquired at the workplace.

Some examples exist of fruitful cooperation between two Regions of two cities which were able to set up agreements enabling exchanges for young people in VET programmes (e.g. in cross-border cooperation). But they are limited and require ad-hoc negotiations and agreements that need to be re-discussed at each occurrence, and are not transferable to other situations.

The "full" learning mobility (i.e. combining both learning in school + and learning at the workplace) of a young person in VET produces a "multiple lever effect" in value creation

- for the young person herself, because she can benefit:
 - from a longer immersion in the country: language, culture, family life, etc.;
 - from the time spent in school: other ways of learning and doing school work, etc.;
 - and from the time spent in the company: organisation of work, tools, strategy to access markets, etc.;
- for the training centre;
- for the company and its internationalisation;
- for Europe, acquiring values associated with European citizenship.

"one moves, everybody is changing"

The mobility of VET people might nonetheless be facilitated by:

- the existence of Regional platforms to support mobility in VET (e.g. plateforme Auvergne-Rhône-Alpes pour la mobilité des apprentis), which identify clearly and precisely the mobility options and processes available for young people in VET (one-stop-shop mechanism for pooling data and communication tools);
- the existence of mobility referents in training centres;
- the training of staff and personnel in school and colleges, and of mentors or tutors in companies;
- the existence of labels for the quality of mobility on the company's side (e.g. Euroapprenticeship label);
- the existence of "ad-hoc" partnerships between Regions which enable to smoothen the issues concerning regulations, work contracts, insurances, social security, etc.;
- the definition of a statute of the "European Apprentice" and a single regulatory framework;
- the strengthening of the role of intermediary institutions – both territorial and sectorial – involved in the preparation, management and follow-up of mobility.

A statement

It is absolutely necessary to multiply the possibilities for young persons in VET to spend time abroad during their learning pathway and, thus, to:

- ✓ increase the number of mobilities: number of young people abroad, number of training centres sending and/or housing youngsters, number of companies involved;
- ✓ increase the duration of each mobility: one week is definitely not enough; a trimester or semester would be the right time to benefit from "full" mobility;
- ✓ enhance the quality of mobility: developing and promoting quality labels could be a good option (like the Euroapprenticeship label);
- ✓ focus on the duality school + company;
- ✓ facilitate the validation and recognition of skills and competences acquired non-formally, in companies or in training centres;

- ✓ ensure recognition of the benefits of the mobility (for all actors) by creating observatories to evidence the mid and long term effects;
- ✓ take the diversity of target groups in VET into account: apprentices, VET students with lower general education, and company based trainees.

Hence, it is important:

- ✓ to acknowledge all the steps already covered, e.g.:
 - for example, the convention between the Rhone-Alpes region and Catalonia 10 years ago;
 - the declaration of Barcelona (2009-2010);
 - impacts survey for European programmes;
 - etc.
- ✓ to mobilise all possible financing bodies, programmes, projects and funds:
 - Erasmus+, naturally, but also:
 - other European funds: youth programmes, ESF, ERDF, Interreg, etc.;
 - national funds;
 - private funds (industries, trade, chamber of commerce, etc.);
 - and **regional funds**;
- ✓ to acknowledge the major role played by Regions:
 - they inform;
 - they accompany;
 - they support;
 - they organise;
 - they implement systems and platforms;
 - they put all actors around the table: training centres, chambers of commerce, chambers of trade, industries, entrepreneurs, etc.;
 - and **they also finance** mobilities.

What we propose

The Networks of Regions FREREF and EARLALL propose to all their members and to all Regions, Municipalities, etc., public and private regional bodies, committed in developing and sustaining learning mobility in VET to act in common:

- to valorise and develop the role of Regions besides the Commission and Parliament initiatives and programmes;
- to promote and sustain the development of Regional Platforms for VET mobility as key assets of regional policies for VET and VET mobility;
- to sustain an in-depth reflection about mobility as a whole development process (before and after and not only during); this means:
 - for Erasmus+, for example, to provide with a specific budget line for building stable partnerships (including companies) to set up lasting processes to prepare VET learning mobilities among them and their networks; to also provide with a budget line to develop a permanent participatory evaluation process within these partnerships;
 - for the Regions, to include all these concerns in their platforms;
 - for all, to develop a joint open dialogue and cooperation between Regions and the European Commission (DG EAC and DG Employment), to better evaluate the impacts and results of the innovations on the policies, and issue relevant advice to go further;

- **to have a strategic reflexion about the impact of learning mobility on the evolution of jobs, workplaces, trade, partnerships, etc.** The French Agency Erasmus+ is at the origin of the creation of a national observatory for mobility, which is a good initiative. We suggest that the Regional Platforms also develop an Observatory function; assessing impacts at regional level would be more consistent with the learning mobility process management.

To start the process

- Join us during the workshop “Mobility in VET and apprenticeships”, organised during the Vocational Skills Week in Brussels on 8th December 2016 to promote our action and start creating the process; for this, we need the support of as many Regional and European Bodies as possible; <http://ec.europa.eu/social/main.jsp?langId=en&catId=88&eventsId=1125&furtherEvents=yes>
- We propose to launch an inventory of **existing platforms, systems, etc. in all our members' regions** and **collect innovative practices to sustain mobility for VET student** - and more precisely apprentices as defined at the beginning of the paper; this could be supported for example by a European project submitted in the 2017 Calls;
- After that, we propose to foster and sustain the **creation of a European Community of Practice in developing and sustaining VET mobility, supported by the interconnection of the Regional Platforms**; it does not require to create a new structure, but rather to organise structured links and exchanges between the actors in Regional Platforms; to share innovative practices, to improve, enhance and smoothen the mobility process for VET students, because they need more support due to the difficulties we have listed above; the methodology for building the Community of Practice could be derived in a first project and implemented through a new one;
- In a longer term, to foster the further creation of partnerships of institutions and bodies working in VET mobility, which will launch and promote further common initiatives and projects and collect innovative successful practices.