

The Helsinki Awards 2006 process

LINKING POLICY TO PRACTICE

Background information and facts

[CIMO logo]

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Background

On 30 November 2002 the education Ministers of 31 European countries and the European Commission adopted the Copenhagen Declaration on enhanced cooperation in European vocational education and training. The Declaration was adopted at a meeting in Copenhagen organised by the Danish presidency.

The goals of the Copenhagen process are, by means of increasing cooperation: to improve the quality of vocational education, to increase the attractiveness of vocational education and to improve the mobility of those in and graduated from vocational education.

The Copenhagen Declaration has eight points of emphasis:

1. Strengthening of the European Dimension of vocational education and training
2. Increasing transparency
3. Guidance and counselling
4. Recognition of competences and qualifications
5. Sectoral cooperation
6. Common quality criteria and quality assurance systems
7. Recognition and validation of non-formal and informal learning
8. Further training needs of teachers and instructors

With the Copenhagen process the LdV programme has acquired a clearer political background and the LdV programme has, indeed, been mentioned as a tool for proceeding towards the goals set in Copenhagen.

On 15 December 2004 during the Dutch presidency the goals of the Copenhagen process were further strengthened during the Maastricht conference on strengthening European cooperation in vocational education and training. On that occasion the Maastricht Communiqué was issued.

The Maastricht Communiqué highlighted further, among others, the following aspects: development of an open and flexible European qualifications framework (EQF), development and implementation of the European credit transfer system for VET (ECVET) and the changing role of VET teachers and trainers

The nominations

As agreed in Maastricht 2004, the Finnish Presidency is organising on 4 -5 December 2006 an Informal Ministerial Meeting in Helsinki as a follow-up meeting of the Copenhagen process started in 2002 during the Danish presidency. This meeting evaluates the implementation and reviews the priorities and strategies for European cooperation in VET.

To exemplify the importance of the Leonardo da Vinci programme as a testing field for the strategies and priorities agreed in Copenhagen and Maastricht, an exhibition is

organised during the Ministerial Meeting. The projects presented will also be awarded a Helsinki Award for good practice in relation to the Copenhagen themes.

To this end the European Commission in cooperation with the Finnish Ministry of Education and the Finnish Leonardo NA asked for nominations from all 32 National Agencies in Europe, in order to find candidates for a selection of good-practice projects. The nominations covered projects selected and contracted under Leonardo da Vinci –programme procedure B and C during the years 2000-2005.

The nominations were requested from the point-of-view of their links to the Copenhagen process under the following nomination categories:

Category 1: Transparency, including the European Qualifications Framework (EQF)

Category 2: Guidance and counselling

Category 3: Recognition of competences and qualifications, including ECVET

Category 4: Sectoral cooperation

Category 5: Validation of non-formal and informal learning

Category 6: Quality assurance

Category 7: The changing role of vocational teachers and trainers

The evaluations

The nominated projects were evaluated by five external experts contracted by the Commission. The concrete aim of the evaluation phase was to locate projects that have links to the Copenhagen process and the Maastricht Communiqué and to assess the strength of those links in the projects. An additional aim was to locate the top 50 projects to be included in a compendium and produce the information necessary to choose the Helsinki Award winners.

Each expert evaluated a total number of 32 project nominations, using an evaluation grid containing the following criteria:

Criterion 1: Relevance to the selected theme

Criterion 2: Core innovation of the project in relation to theme

Criterion 3: Results and products

Criterion 4: Impact and benefit to target group

Criterion 5: Valorisation and up-take of results

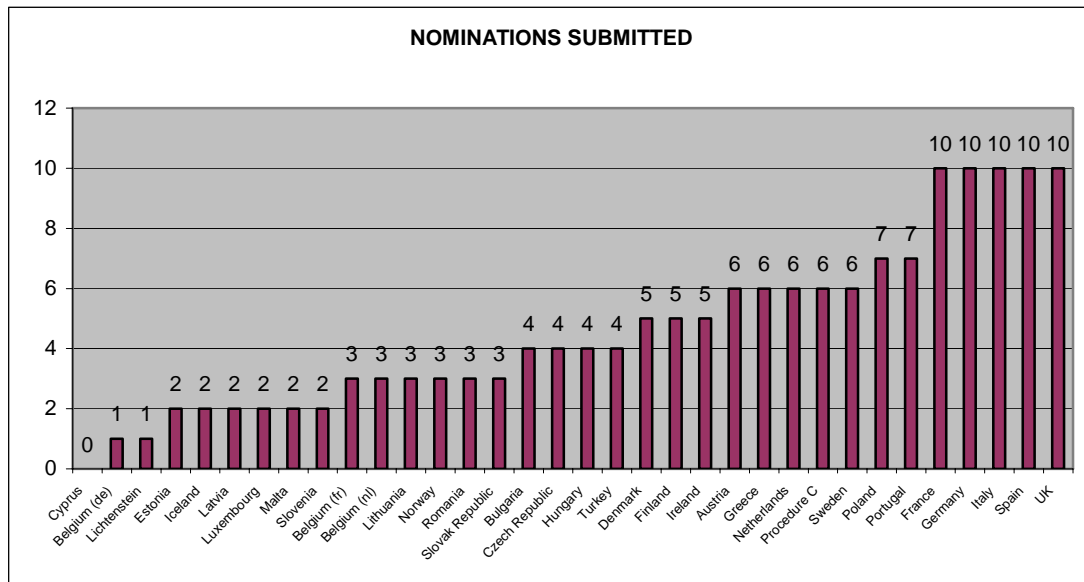
Criterion 6: Partnership and transnationality

Based on the first round of evaluations each expert identified the ten most promising projects for an in depth evaluation, resulting in an in depth report per evaluated project. Finally, each expert wrote an overview and final report describing the evaluated projects links to the Copenhagen priorities.

The results

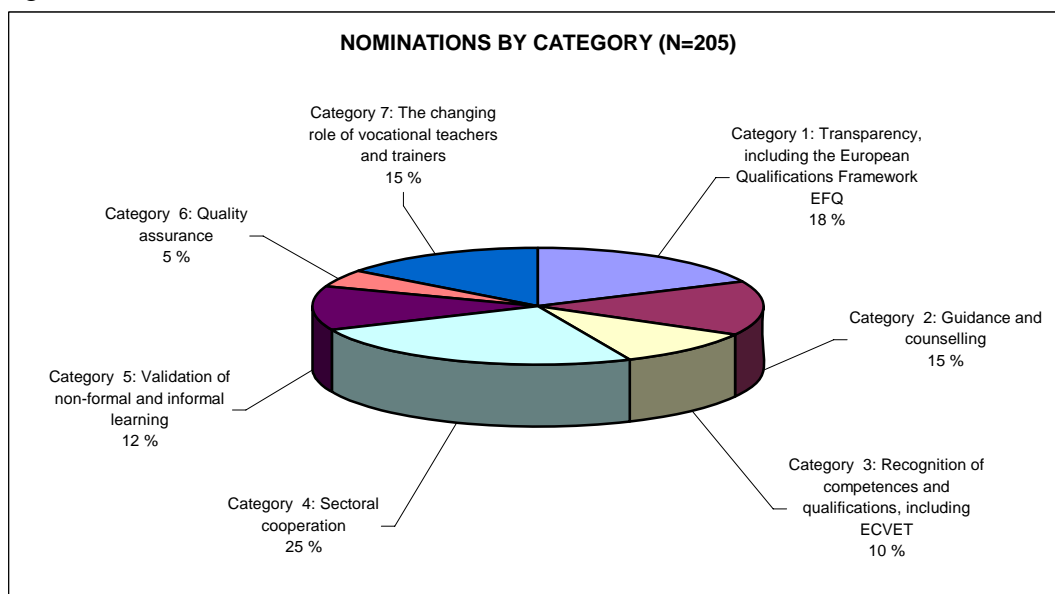
A total of 157 nominated projects from 31 countries were received by the deadline. The distribution per country can be seen in Figure 1 and the distribution per category in Figure 2.

Figure 1



Note: A varying number of 1 – 10 nominations were requested from each country according to amounts of selected and contracted projects in that country. All countries did not submit the requested amount of nominations.

Figure 2



Note: A total of 45 projects were indicated to cover two or more categories

From policy to practice

According to the final reports of the external evaluators involved in the process, the projects presented for the Helsinki Awards provide an interesting overview of Leonardo da Vinci projects implemented from 2000 up to 2005 within the areas covered by the Copenhagen process and the Maastricht Communiqué. They also provide a good understanding of how policy objectives and goals were translated into practice through transnational co-operation.

One of the challenges of the evaluators was to assess projects generated before the Copenhagen Declaration, using the criteria stemming from the Declaration and also from the Maastricht Communiqué of 2004. Despite this challenge, all projects made to a varying degree an attempt to enhance VET practices and to strengthen European transnational co-operation in order to implement the “Education and Training 2010” programme and to contribute to the achievement of the goals stated by the European Council held in Lisbon on 2000 according to which “[...] *the Union must become the most competitive and dynamic knowledge-based economy in the world capable of sustainable economic growth with more and better jobs and greater social cohesion* [...]”.

Overall, the projects have very different potential to impact on vocational training systems and practices. This seems to depend a lot on the composition of the partnership and its experience/expertise in the chosen field. What was possible to observe by the evaluators, was that ‘local partnerships’ composed by institutions which are not part of the broader VET system (decision and policy makers, public authorities, professional associations, social partners, practitioners, ...) seem to have a reduced potential of impacting and changing practices, if compared to partnerships where all these relevant stakeholders are represented. This means that, even if the project idea is sometimes stronger than the one of other projects, small scale projects are not always able to make themselves visible and to raise awareness enough in order to stimulate a virtual circle that goes from policy to practice and back to policy level.

Furthermore, two elements seem to be very important as far as policy or system impact is concerned. The first one is the inclusion of piloting phases during project implementation. This kind of experimentation allows projects to develop well targeted results and to validate their content before finalising them thanks to the feedback provided by potential users/beneficiaries. The second element is the involvement of stakeholders in dissemination/valorisation activities. When relevant stakeholders directly participate in project implementation, the capacity of the project to raise awareness (even among policy and decision makers) seems to be higher.

Another element observed by the evaluators, is the sustainability of project results. Apart from the efforts done by the partnerships (websites still online beyond project lifetime, use of developed materials and products in participating countries, exploitation of already existing networks ...) it seems that the attempts done by national authorities or European institutions in order to make the broader VET community profit/benefit of the achieved results is still weak in comparison with all materials produced. Valorisation efforts should also be taking place on a centralised level and project promoters should be supported by policy level in order to enhance and further develop/exploit their work beyond project lifetime.

The fifty projects selected to be included in the compendium, ten by each evaluator, can be seen to exemplify concrete contributions into the implementation of VET policy in the EU. However, according to the evaluators this goal must be understood in the broadest possible sense, as many of the projects also aim to fulfill local, national and sectoral needs.

Finally, some reasons, listed by the evaluators, for including the projects in the top fifty selection can be identified as follows:

- The projects all have clearly expressed innovativeness of the project ideas and results. As the projects evaluated have been launched in different years the core of the innovation varies, but all of them are innovative.
- The projects have identified needs, which have a European dimension, but the partners have also been able to see regional or local aspects of these problems and to create flexible products to that extent.
- Many of the nominee projects have succeeded to invite into their partnership at least some international professional organisations, improving the dissemination and valorisation aspect of the project work.
- Many of these projects facilitate the spill-over of good practice from the countries/regions with better experience and competence to the regions lagging behind in implementation of certain technologies or methods.
- The projects can serve as good examples of establishing and maintaining international co-operation, where educational institutions and industry are simultaneously involved. Most of the projects have been developed into the partners networks, with good opportunities to initiate new co-operative actions.
- The projects in this selection, which are finished, have shown outstanding sustainability of their products. Usually, the quality of the projects' ideas and sustainability of co-operation and products created, is proved by developing some follow-up projects, where practices will be developed further and will be spread into the new regions of Europe.
- Some of the projects have been able to achieve recognition of their unified products in the partner countries' educational programmes, which facilitates the process of mutual recognition of qualifications and makes qualifications more transparent.
- All the projects have contributed into the *implementation* of European VET policy, and some of them have even contributed to the *development and design* of VET policy.

The Helsinki Awards 2006

Out of the 50 projects selected for the compendium 10 projects will be recognized with the Helsinki Awards 2006 during the Informal Ministerial Meeting organised by the Finnish Presidency on 4 –5 December 2006 in Helsinki, Finland.