

BRIEFING PAPER ON QUALITY CRITERIA

1 INTRODUCTION: BREAKING NEW GROUND

This briefing paper provides inputs to the 1st Working Group meeting on quality criteria. It is based on a preliminary literature review designed to scope out what is currently known in the field. The process of conducting this review has highlighted the extent to which the Working Group will be breaking new ground. Whilst the review took as its starting point the work of the “IdA–integration through exchange” project, it sought relevant documentation amongst a wide range of other programmes including the Lifelong Learning Programme and Youth in Action. One of the most striking findings to emerge from this process has been the extent to which the development of both quality criteria and of mobility activities for disadvantaged youth and young adults has lagged behind the expansion in mobility schemes that has taken place in recent years. The corollary of this is that the Working Group's activities will potentially be of value beyond the immediate and important work of developing the quality criteria for the co-ordinated call.

1.1 Objectives of the Working Group

The purpose of the Working Group is to address the key questions shown in the box below in order to draft a set of common quality criteria.

KEY QUESTIONS TO BE ADDRESSED
<p>Preparatory Phase <i>How will potential participants be reached/addressed and selected?</i></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> ○ What could be ways for active recruitment of participants? ○ How to assess the potential and competencies of participants? <p><i>What are the key elements of the preparation of the stay abroad?</i></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> ○ What are the key elements of the preparation for intercultural experiences? ○ What is necessary to prepare the internship abroad? ○ How to ensure placement in the most suitable internship? ○ What kind of agreements are necessary? <p>Implementation Phase <i>What kind of framework is needed during the stay abroad?</i></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> ○ How to organize opportunity to reflect on experiences gained? ○ What kind of support is needed in case of conflicts? ○ What could be the role of the transnational partner? <p>Follow-up Phase <i>What is needed to use the positive experiences and “empowerment” of the participants for a sustainable access to the labour market?</i></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> ○ How to organize reflection on experiences gained abroad? ○ Who should be involved in preparing job placement, training, (secondary/ professional) school or ex-post school-leaving qualification?

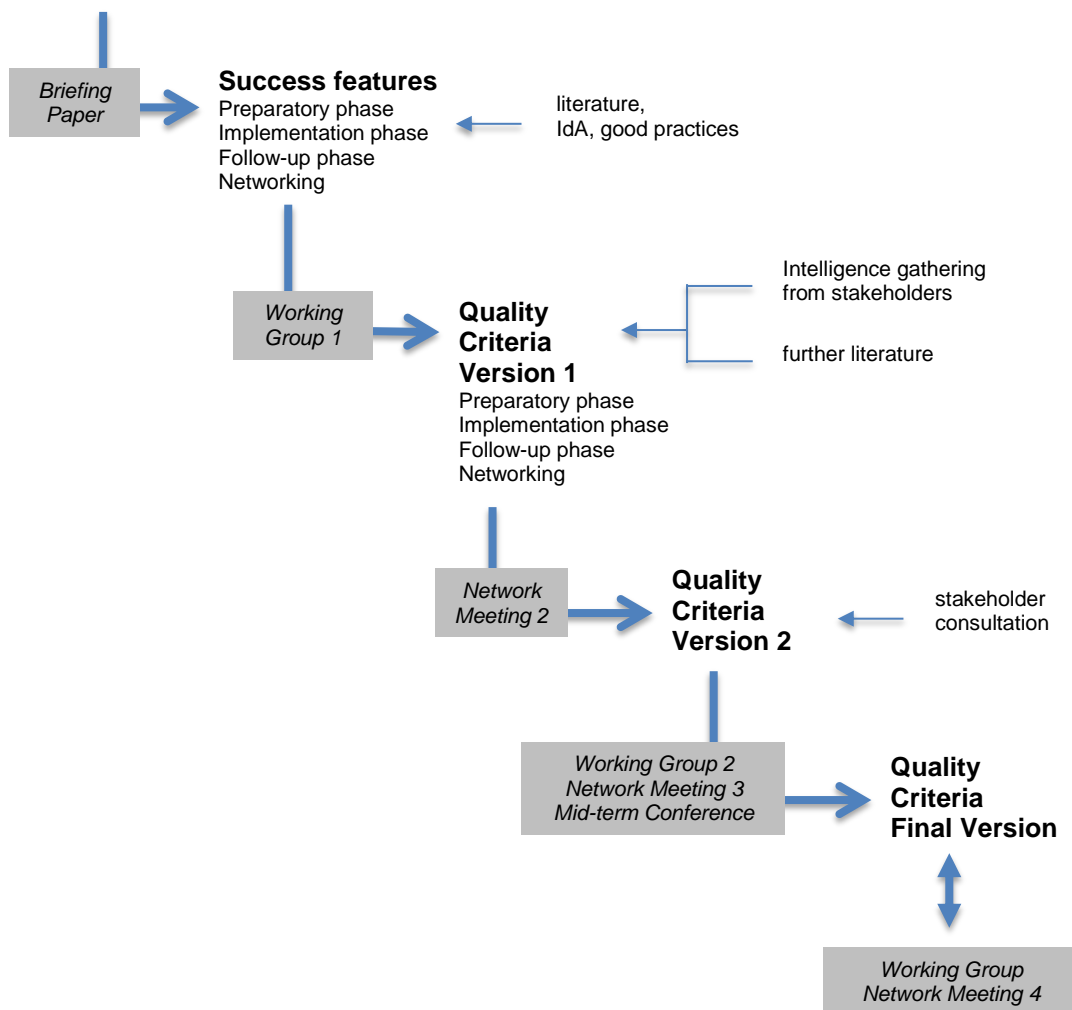
Networking
What kind of networking would be useful, national and international, to assure and/or improve the quality of transnational mobility measures for the target group?

These questions have been of long-standing concern in transnational mobility. The challenge here is how to structure and adapt key programme components to the mobility of disadvantaged youth and young adults. In order to do this, a staged approach has been adopted (Figure 1). This method is designed to move from the questions shown in the box above to quality criteria in a developmental fashion. The aim is to develop quality criteria against each of the questions posed for: preparation; implementation; follow-up; and networking. To do this, the process begins by identifying the features of successful interventions which are known to deliver positive outcomes, drawing on good practice. This paper begins this process. Following the Working Group meeting wider intelligence gathering of success features and stakeholder consultation will take place.

Figure 1 Overview of Method

Key Questions:

- Preparatory phase
- Implementation phase
- Follow-up phase
- Networking



During the preparation of the quality criteria, the objective will be to make them as clear and unambiguous as possible across languages and across different Member State contacts. They will be based on specific needs of the target groups and take into account gender and cultural aspects. An illustrative example is provided in the box below. The quality criteria will form part of the agreed common parameters for regional/national calls and will be differentiated according to whether they are essential ("must have") or desirable ("nice to have").

Development of quality criteria: illustrative example
<p>Needs of the target group:</p> <p>Youth who have left school early lack formal qualifications and are unable to demonstrate their competences to potential employers on the labour market.</p>
<p>Illustrative quality criterion:</p> <p>Early school leavers joining mobility programmes should undergo an assessment of all competences potentially required on the labour market, including those relevant to employment specified in the European Key Competences for Lifelong Learning.</p>

1.2 Aims of this paper

To take this forward, this paper:

- Places our work in context by outlining the state of play in terms of the twin issues of central concern: quality in mobility programmes; and mobility activities for disadvantaged people.
- Provides an overview of the needs of disadvantaged youth and young adults in terms of the obstacles they face to participating in mobility programmes.
- Sets out key issues and associated principles that, it is proposed, should frame the development of the quality criteria.
- Provides key "raw materials" for the Working Group meeting in terms of the preliminary assessment of the features of successful transnational mobility activities for the target group.

2 PUTTING OUR WORK IN CONTEXT

The starting point for this paper has been a review of key literature to begin to identify the features widely regarded as critical for successful intervention against the key questions set out above. The focus has been on identifying good practices in relation to transnational mobility activities for disadvantaged people. At the same time, a review was also made of the literature relating to the development of approaches to quality in mobility activities. For both sets of literature it was found that, whilst both topics have been highlighted as important areas for development at European level, progress has been very patchy and hence the literature remains scattered and fragmented.

2.1 Disadvantaged people in transnational mobility

In relation to transnational mobility activities for disadvantaged people, in 2004 it was found that *“very little has been done in the way of dedicated research and development, and even documentation of practice is extremely sparse. This means that project coordinators setting out to organise placement projects for disadvantaged groups are required largely to harvest their own experiences and proceed in a process of trial and error.”*¹ In 2008 the evaluation of the Socrates and Leonardo da Vinci programmes concluded that *“issues of social disadvantage have not been a prominent feature within most of the programmes and actions examined, despite being emphasised as an important horizontal issue .”*² Last year, the thematic network on inclusion set up under the Lifelong Learning Programme found that little had changed and that, indeed, under the LLP little attention was still being paid to the issue of disadvantage in general, let alone applied to mobility in particular³.

2.2 Quality in transnational mobility

Similarly, there have been increasing calls from a wide range of sources in recent years for the development of more comprehensive approaches to quality, with little apparent response. For example, in May 2011 a European conference organised by the European Commission and the Council of Europe on “Framework, quality and impact of young European’s learning mobility” concluded that there was a need for quality criteria and indicators at European level⁴. In 2012, a major study on mobility activities for the EC found that even though “quality” is an important topic in policy papers and discussions, the concrete manifestations are often at a high abstraction level (e.g. quality charters). There is only limited evidence of diversified quality assurance or quality management systems being developed and implemented and the study came across only a few examples of fully fledged approaches to mobility of this type, and these were not linked to a particular mobility scheme, but developed as projects that may

¹ page 62, Cedefop (2004) Disadvantaged groups in transnational placement projects
http://www.cedefop.europa.eu/en/Files/5155_EN.PDF

² Joint report on the evaluation of the Socrates II, Leonardo da Vinci and eLearning Programmes-Executive summary-ECOTEC
Research & Consulting, January 2008, p. 33
http://ec.europa.eu/dgs/education_culture/evalreports/training/2007/joint/joint_en.pdf

³ Inclusion Network (undated) Lifelong Learning for All. A Report on Recommendations for a more Inclusive and Accessible LLP and the new Education and Training Programme.
<http://www.lifelonglearningprogramme.org.uk/uploads/Inclusion%20Recommendations%20Final%202027-01-12.pdf>

⁴ http://youth-partnership-eu.coe.int/youth-partnership/documents/EKCYP/Youth_Policy/docs/Mobility/Youth_work/mobility_conference_documentation.pdf

(or may not) be used for mobility activities within a field or sector.

The most relevant sets of quality criteria for our work – the *European Quality Charter for Mobility*⁵ and the *Leonardo da Vinci Mobility Quality Commitment for Training Placements*⁶ - are very concise and highly generalised. Thus, although there is a growing body of literature on quality at European level it tends to be of a general nature rather than dealing with mobility. This will be useful for our work later as it provides useful models of how to organise quality criteria, but there is little directly relevant material to draw on at this point.

2.3 Bringing the two together

Perhaps unsurprisingly, in relation to the twin topics of quality and disadvantaged people in mobility it seems, to date, to have been a question of the old English phrase “nair the twain shall meet” (i.e. “never the two shall meet”)⁷. There is no body of literature as such which deals with the issue of the critical success factors for or quality in mobility programmes for disadvantaged people, although there is some work in relation to how to adapt education and training provision in general to the needs of disadvantaged groups which we can use to inform our analysis.

In relation to the task of developing quality criteria, these findings mean that our work will depend significantly on the experiences, perspectives and insights from Working Group members and wider stakeholders. We shall discuss at the Working Group meeting the best ways to engage stakeholders, e.g. through an expert stakeholder workshop or other methods.

⁵ See attachment “European Quality Charter for Mobility”

⁶ See attachment “Leonardo da Vinci Mobility Quality Commitment for Training Placements”

⁷ This is perhaps well illustrated in the Erasmus programme which in 2011 and 2012 had strands on both developing mobility quality and also the social dimension but did not link the two!

3 THE NEEDS OF DISADVANTAGED YOUTH AND YOUNG ADULTS

In this section, we provide an overview of the problems faced by disadvantaged youth and young adults and what this means for the design of mobility programmes. It is important to point out that the notion of “disadvantage” is complex and embraces a wide range of different communities. This means we should be cautious in generalising, as different people will face different combinations of problems to different degrees. Another Working Group is dealing with this issue and its outputs will be incorporated into our work as it progresses.

3.1 Obstacles to participation in mobility programmes

In recent years there has been a steady accumulation of evidence relating to the problems that disadvantaged people face in accessing education and training in general and we can use this in relation to mobility since it is reasonable to assume that the same issues pertain. We can broadly identify two sets of obstacles, as shown in the table below.

Obstacles to participation in mobility programmes	
<i>Dispositional</i>	<i>Situational</i>
Poor self-confidence	Time constraints
Weak motivation	Lack of resources
Negative perceptions of education and training	Constraints of location
Little self-awareness of own abilities and potential	Poor qualifications

Source: Adapted from Table 6.2, McCoshan, A. et al (2008) Beyond the Maastricht Communiqué: developments in the opening up of VET pathways and the role of VET in labour market integration. Consolidated Final Report to the European Commission

On the one hand, we can identify “dispositional” barriers which are the values, attitudes and perceptions of the individual. In essence, the issue here is one of negative perceptions and lack of confidence and self-esteem, which in the worst cases become locked in self-reinforcing vicious circles. For mobility programmes, they are particularly influential in producing low motivation to participate. The other set of obstacles are “situational”. These arise from the personal circumstances of individuals and concern constraints around time, resources etc.

These sets of factors do not exist in isolation of one another; rather, they tend to be mutually reinforcing and interact in complex ways. People who are most disadvantaged tend to experience a large proportion of the problems shown in the table and consequently tend to be “harder to reach” than others. Negative perceptions of formal education and training, often stemming from poor experiences at school, emphasise the value of mobility programmes for this target group as they offer alternative ways of learning.

3.2 Implications for mobility programmes

These obstacles have two main implications for mobility programmes.

First, the prevalence of attitudinal issues means that disadvantaged participants often require intensive support from the beginning to the end of a mobility period: negative perceptions can block participation and inhibit participants from getting the full benefit and require particular forms of support to be overturned. Disadvantaged youth and young adults are less likely to take responsibility for the success of their own placements and hence require ongoing guidance.

Secondly, these obstacles mean that mobility programmes have the potential to help disadvantaged people address underlying motivational issues which hold them back. Transnational mobility has been seen as creating a “free space” in which participants are placed in foreign environments where their anonymity provides an opportunity to start afresh and experiment with aspects of their personality and vocational direction (Cedefop, 2004). Thus mobility programmes can have a special value for disadvantaged people by enabling them to develop self-confidence, self-esteem, a sense of purpose and to clarify personal goals and ambitions. Transnational mobility programmes contain a number of design elements that can be adjusted to respond to the precise needs of particular target groups.

4 GUIDING PRINCIPLES

This section sets out a number of principles which it is proposed should provide the framework in which the quality criteria will be developed. They are derived from the preliminary literature review and documentation associated with the Transnational Learning Network including the minutes of the first Network Meeting.

4.1 Defining quality

“Quality” is one of those concepts which has an implicit and obvious meaning but is difficult to define satisfactorily. One definition which seems to have some common currency at the moment is that quality is “what we experience when a product or service lives up to expectations” (insert reference). However, it is proposed that we should adopt a definition more specific to learning mobility programmes, as follows:

“Quality is what is necessary to ensure that desired learning outcomes are achieved.”

4.2 Quality criteria, quality assurance and quality management systems

Evidently, there is a relationship between quality criteria and wider systems of quality assurance and management. Indeed, there is an argument that quality criteria on their own do not deliver the same benefits unless they are part of coherent quality strategies (the MoVE-iT report recommended transforming generic quality criteria into specific quality assurance strategies⁸). However, our task here is a specific one: to develop quality criteria for the coordinated call. Organisations involved in mobility may ultimately adopt the quality criteria we develop into their own quality management systems, but our task is to develop criteria that will help to ensure successful outcomes for mobility activities in a wide variety of settings.

4.3 Differentiating between “essential” and “desirable” quality criteria

Connected to this, during the process of developing the quality criteria we shall need to differentiate between “essential” and “desirable” criteria. This is important to allow for the large variety of contexts in which mobility will take place, and also in light of the need for intensive preparation and support which disadvantaged youth and young adults often need, as noted above. An important issue as we progress will be to determine where we set the “bar”, the level at which we differentiate between essential and desirable criteria. One factor to take into account will be the need to ensure that quality criteria are designed efficiently in resource terms, that they are as streamlined as possible and don't impose an unnecessary administrative burden on mobility organisations. As the Network Meeting minutes note, the framework also needs to be ready to use.

4.4 Linking to existing tools

It is important that our work keeps in touch with wider developments. In particular, questions of how to validate non-formal and informal learning and how to recognise learning undertaken during mobility activities are vital issues to consider as we progress. Both these

⁸ CINOP and PricewaterhouseCoopers (2007) MoVE-iT final report. Overcoming obstacles to mobility for apprentices and other young people in vocational education and training.
http://ec.europa.eu/education/more-information/doc/moveit_en.pdf

topics are also high on the agenda of the EU, and good practices have been gathered and tools developed to tackle them, notably in the form of the inventory on validation and the European Credit system for Vocational Education and Training (ECVET). It will be important to ensure that the quality criteria link to these tools.

4.5 Coverage

As mentioned, defining “disadvantage” is a complex matter and covers a range of diverse individuals and communities. It is proposed in the minutes to the first Network Meeting that our work should include people with disabilities as well as unemployed graduates which potentially widens our coverage still further. This will be taken into account as the work progresses. It is possible that, if necessary, specific quality criteria are developed for particular target groups.

4.6 Proving the case for transnational mobility for disadvantaged youth and young adults

The Network Meeting minutes record that it should be possible for the Learning Network to demonstrate that transnational mobility measures for this target group are “an efficient tool for promoting employment”. To do this will require embedding monitoring and evaluation within mobility activities. They should therefore feature in the quality criteria developed.

4.7 Placing the individual participant at the centre

A common thread in current thinking about quality in mobility programmes (and indeed more widely in education and training) is to place the individual participant or learner at the centre of developments. For example, the *European Quality Charter for Mobility*⁹ contains a quality criterion on “personalisation”. As the previous section emphasised, people experiencing disadvantage experience unique combinations of problems and this makes it all the more important that mobility programmes are tailored as much as possible to individual needs. But even more than that, the fact that many disadvantaged youth and young adults have a feeling of powerlessness—especially in relation to education and training, unemployment schemes etc—means that giving them the ability to make decisions about their placements is critical. Hence, any quality criteria developed should seek to empower participants.

⁹ See attachment “European Quality Charter for Mobility”

5 FEATURES OF SUCCESSFUL TRANSNATIONAL MOBILITY ACTIVITIES FOR DISADVANTAGED YOUTH AND YOUNG ADULTS

In this section we provide key “raw materials” for the 1st meeting of the Working Group in terms of an initial examination of those features of mobility programmes which it has been possible to identify as being important for success.

In terms of the evidence available to inform this section, as noted at the 1st Network Meeting, it derives from a preliminary literature review. Specific evidence, as noted above, in the form of good practices in mobility for disadvantaged groups has proved to be very scattered and fragmented. As a result, more is known about some issues than others. However, the design of the method enables evidence to be gathered from other sources apart from existing literature in the coming weeks and months which will fill gaps and build on the existing evidence. Further, the Working Group meeting itself provides the opportunity to begin the process of gathering expert views.

5.1 Overview

In general, the key elements of the process of preparing and executing placements abroad are well understood. However, it is informative to note that empirical evidence shows that some parts of the process are typically much less developed than others. In particular *“...there seems to be much less emphasis on preparation and debriefing after homecoming than the actual placement period itself, but it may be argued that in the case of disadvantaged participants, these elements are of crucial importance to the success of the project in terms of learning”*¹⁰. Evidence from mobility programmes in general¹¹ (not those targeted specifically at disadvantaged groups) highlights issues with:

- Poor preparation of participants to handle potential problems such as lack of language and cultural skills. A 2007 survey showed that while 77% of participants in EC mobility schemes surveyed had received what they considered to be appropriate preparation, in some countries the figure was much lower, e.g. Portugal–43%, Spain–41%, and Italy–32%. Furthermore, only 55% of the survey participants rated it as good or very good.
- Ineffective mentoring whilst participants were abroad and inadequate assistance with learning processes within hosting companies. Most participants in the 2007 survey ranked support during their stay abroad as average.
- Disappointment with the way debriefings are done upon return and lack of opportunities for participants to discuss their experiences in order for them to incorporate them into career development.

¹⁰ page 61, Cedefop (2004) Disadvantaged groups in transnational placement projects
http://www.cedefop.europa.eu/en/Files/5155_EN.PDF

¹¹ See WFS Economic and Social Research (2007) Analysis of the Effects of Leonardo da Vinci Mobility Measures on Young Trainees, Employees and the Influence of Socio-economic Factors.
http://ec.europa.eu/education/pdf/doc218_en.pdf; and Christodoulides G.D. et al (2010) A Study Report on Mobility. See ‘Baseline Study on Mobility’ at:
<http://www.youthemploymentnet.eu/Portal/PortalDocuments.aspx?DocumentId=b059fb3d-238c-4263-bae7-bd27c0a7c7ec>

- Lack of appropriate strategies amongst participating institutions linked to lack of capacity to manage international activities (too little time, too little experience).

In relation to the issue of gender, there is a particularly acute lack of evidence. However, the 2007 survey found no significant differences in satisfaction levels or impact according to gender. It did find, however, some differences in certain areas. For example, the main criticism highlighted by young women was insufficient mentoring by the host organisation during the placement (25% as against 16% of men). Conversely, men were more likely to see “red tape” as a problem (30% versus 19%).

Given the lack of evidence in relation to gender in mobility programmes we would welcome inputs from Working Group members about the nature of the different support required by men and women, and any good practice examples they can provide. Gender issues vary from country to country and it would be beneficial to the development of quality criteria to be able to reflect these differences also.

5.2 Issues to consider

The following sections present an initial examination of the features considered to be important to the success of mobility programmes for disadvantaged youth and young adults.

Questions to consider both before and during the forthcoming Working Group are:

1. Which of the success features are most important from your point of view and why?
2. Are there any additional features not mentioned and why should they be included?
3. Where are the gaps in our knowledge and how should they be filled (e.g. by holding a special stakeholders' meeting or other methods)?
4. What good practices can you identify that would help to build on the evidence compiled to date?

5.3 Preparatory phase

It is almost self-evident that good preparation maximises the chances of a successful outcome for participants. It is widely recognised that for disadvantaged youth and young adults preparation is especially important and needs to be more intensive given the challenges they face.

5.3.1 Defining the objectives of the placements

Prior to recruitment and selection, it needs to be very clear what the intended learning outcomes are for the target group in question. This means specifying clearly the skills and competences to be acquired. From this the content of the placements should be defined in order to deliver these skills and competences. This is significant as it has been argued that the 3 main goals of mobility (promoting intercultural understanding, promoting the acquisition of language skills and promoting employability), whilst in many programmes being referred to

together, are “quite different in nature, and require different methods to succeed”¹². Despite this, the specification of objectives and learning outcomes in mobility programmes is often quite loose and vague. This is arguably not a major problem where we are dealing with short-term mobility and/or mobility intended as cultural “experience”. However, interventions with the “harder” edge of employability as their goal need well-developed, clearly specified and precise objectives.

Elsewhere it has been argued that for disadvantaged groups the real significance of the stay abroad appears to be the acquisition of personal skills—self-confidence, self-esteem, sense of purpose and clarified personal goals and ambitions—and that the main learning mode should be based on the participants taking responsibility. The key learning outcome is of a psychodynamic nature arising from the sense of achievement of having coped with the challenge of the study abroad¹³. Given that the activities we are concerned with are strongly focused on employment, we should consider the applicability of this claim and what it may mean for establishing quality criteria for the definition of placement objectives.

5.3.2 Active recruitment of participants

Reaching potential participants is an important challenge for mobility programmes. People from disadvantaged backgrounds are less likely to see themselves as “natural” participants in such programmes, typically having low levels of motivation stemming from issues of low self-confidence and self-esteem. Successful recruitment activities therefore need to be intense and to tackle head-on the possibility of meeting negative attitudes amongst not only potential participants but their family and friends, and the wider community.

Even where most participants are known to organisers—e.g. they are in receipt of unemployment allowance—it is important to think about how to reach them effectively. Methods need to be designed to convince potential participants to take part. In the case of young people, it may also be necessary to convince their parents. Tackling motivational issues requires an individually orientated approach involving direct contact with and knowledge of the life situation of individual participants, whilst also working through the communities in which they live.

A range of methods is at the disposal of programme organisers including: class visits; online methods (targeted e-mails, webinars, use of social media such as Facebook etc); and open days. The suitability of these depend on the target group. Irrespective of the target group, the information conveyed needs to be objective, frank and clear about what is involved in placement abroad. Similarly, involving previous participants is likely to be effective with many different target groups, whether through face-to-face, video or audio testimony.

More generally, effective recruitment depends upon successfully reaching out into communities, for example using community “gatekeepers” such as community or religious leaders, as well as working through local civil society organisations. Developing local people as outreach workers is also another means of achieving success. At the same time, such

¹² European Commission (2012) Study on mobility developments in school education, vocational education and training, adult education and youth exchanges. Prepared by ICON-INSTITUTE GmbH and CO KG Consulting Gruppe. <http://ec.europa.eu/education/documents/more-information/mobility-study-report.pdf>

¹³ Cedefop (2004) Disadvantaged groups in transnational placement projects http://www.cedefop.europa.eu/en/Files/5155_EN.PDF

approaches can be a challenge in many areas because of lack of resources and capabilities amongst local civil society organisations.

In some cases, an invitation to an information or recruitment event can be an obligation. However, available evidence suggests that such obligations do not have a positive effect.

5.3.3 Selecting participants

Careful selection of participants is particularly important in the case of disadvantaged youth and young adults owing to the greater likelihood of their dropping out. Selection procedures should be designed with 2 issues in mind: (1) to ensure that participants are suitable in general for transnational mobility exchange and (2) to ensure a good match with the particular placements available. Selection criteria should also be clear, transparent and agreed by partners.

Although target groups will vary significantly in the nature of their “disadvantage”, it is likely that all participants will to some degree have negative perceptions of themselves as failures, either because they have not succeeded in qualifications at school or because they are experiencing difficulties finding work. As a result, selection procedures need to be designed in a constructive, positive and sensitive manner, with attention being given not just to how to select individuals, but also how to deal with potential participants who are not selected.

Disadvantaged youth and young adults may be suffering from significant issues like drug addiction, depression or other mental health problems. Naturally these need to be taken into account in any selection procedure.

A range of criteria can be set for the selection process including academic performance, and personal attitudes and aptitudes. However, academic performance is likely to be much less relevant in this case given that educational underperformance is likely to be a key feature of most target groups. Academic performance will certainly be less useful as a means of differentiating between individuals who are likely to participate successfully and those not. Consequently, the emphasis in any effective selection process will need to focus on non-academic competences.

Equally, the purpose of the assessment will be to establish potential. This requires a balance to be struck between selecting people who would clearly be able to cope with the unfamiliar and complex situation abroad and those whose possibilities for labour market integration would be enhanced by the mobility period—evidently, they are not necessarily the same. Equally, this issue cannot be answered in isolation of the level of support available. In other words, the question to be addressed will be whether an individual will be able to cope with the stay abroad given the framework of support available? It may also be necessary to determine whether an individual fits within an overall group structure, although this depends upon the role of groups within the placement concerned (see below).

For these reasons, selection procedures should not be narrowly conceived as involving simple methods such as written applications and interviews. These are unlikely to bring out the best in people from disadvantaged backgrounds, nor are they the best methods to reveal non-academic competences and potential. Rather than interviews, face-to-face interactions with potential participants might be best conceived as discussions or guidance talks which give participants a realistic understanding of what is involved in the study abroad. This is likely to reveal if participants have the motivation to continue. Methods such as individual profiling

(using psychometric tests for example) and assessment centres can be used. Other methods include leaving the initiative and ultimately the responsibility with participants to make contact with potential host companies. Participants not up to the task tend to deselect themselves. Whether such an approach is suitable for all forms of disadvantaged youth and young adults is debatable.

In view of the sometimes challenging nature of participants from disadvantaged backgrounds, it is worth giving consideration to whether the contact person (or a representative of the contact organisation) in charge of supervision during the mobility placement should participate in the selection process.

Following the selection procedure, feedback should be given to both selected and rejected applicants.

5.3.4 Preparing for the stay abroad

Once participants have been selected, intensive preparation for the stay abroad is an important feature of successful mobility programmes for disadvantaged people. Many disadvantaged people do not have experience of travelling long distances and may not be very self-reliant so intensive preparation is critical.

The goal is to prepare people for the three key aspects of the placement:

- practical aspects
- professional/vocational dimensions
- the cultural life of the host country.

All three need to be covered adequately.

Various general methods are used to prepare for these aspects. Preparation can be done individually or in groups. Group dynamics can be useful in developing plans although individual preparation can be beneficial for some participants. Former participants can be invited to give talks to alleviate the fears of potential participants by telling them about their experiences and how they were managed. Participants need to be empowered to shape their own preparation such as by collecting information about the host country or region. It may also be beneficial to involve organisations other than the sending organisation in the preparation, such as using language schools. It is also important to involve the foreign partner in these preparations. Ideally, they should get to know the participants before they depart, perhaps visiting the home country of the participant. If this is not possible, they should at least receive individual participant profiles well in advance in order to acquaint themselves fully with both individuals and the group as a whole. Sending organisations need to make sure that they hold handover discussions with host organisations.

Consideration also needs to be given to whether participants are sent and accommodated individually or in groups. This is an important decision as it can affect the amount of interaction with host communities and their culture and customs. Accommodating participants with host families tends to be done on an individual basis and maximises access to local people and hence helps to promote language and intercultural skills. However, accommodating participants in shared lodgings fosters teambuilding and group cohesion,

although it also reduces the possibility of creating the “free space” referred to in section 3.2. The choice of which one to use will depend on the particular target group and their needs.

5.3.5 Preparing for intercultural experiences

For disadvantaged youth and young adults preparatory techniques which help participants come to terms with the potential challenge – the ‘culture shock’ - of going to a foreign country are important. Their aim should be to help participants to see any potential problems or issues (such as learning how to deal with cultural conflicts caused by cultural differences) as positive challenges they can master.

Techniques include various experiential education methods, role-playing and educational theatre which help participants to think through and simulate in advance what they are likely to experience abroad. They enable participants to reflect on their own culture and their images and pre-conceptions of other cultures.

The practical aspects that need to be prepared for include travel arrangements, insurance, residence and work permits, Social Security, accommodation and health and safety. Such issues can be dealt with through information sessions.

5.3.6 Preparing for the internship and ensuring a suitable placement

A range of methods can be used here from prior information meetings to a trial stay in the form of an opportunity for a participant to visit a hosting organisation or company for a couple of days or weeks to learn on the spot about their future work. These methods sit at opposite ends of a spectrum in terms of intensity, resource requirements and effectiveness.

It is vital that participants have their language skills assessed before departure and if necessary provided with any language teaching they require. Such language teaching can take place in the sending country before departure but can also take place in the host country at the start of the placement. The common European language framework provides a convenient means of assessing language skills which is understood widely across Europe.

A vital part of preparing for internships involves working with local partners in the host country to ensure they understand and importantly accept the needs of the participants. Some participants from disadvantaged backgrounds will need intensive help and support during their placement.

Local partners need to be involved in in-company internship planning. They need to have good contacts to local businesses and experience in organising, mentoring and evaluating internships.

Ensuring the most suitable placement involves working closely with local organisations and companies. It is important to make sure the relevant documents from the trainee (such as qualification profiles, certificates and curriculum vitae) are organised in a timely manner to send to the enterprise involved.

5.3.7 Agreements needed

Good practice points to the need for learning plans to be drawn up. These are regarded as being especially important for long-term mobility, although they are also useful for short-term

mobility. Learning plans should be built around placement objectives and expected learning outcomes in terms of the skills and competences to be developed. They should specify how the learning outcomes are to be achieved, including how broader competence development might be incorporated into occupational practice/work tasks. The learning plan should also specify the follow-up processes. They should deal with how the skills and competencies acquired are to be recognised, such as specifying the use of Europe pass and linkages to any qualifications. Indeed, it should be explained to participants from the very start how their experience abroad will be integrated with their existing skills and competences.

There is wide evidence that learning plans for people from disadvantaged backgrounds are most effective when drawn up with their active involvement. Many disadvantaged people have had negative experiences of education and training and a common cause of dissatisfaction is their sense of powerlessness in the learning process. Empowering them to develop their own learning plans therefore helps them to take ownership of them and to be involved in setting their own goals.

A risk management plan is also important. This needs to specify the likely risk of any unforeseen difficulties arising, and the steps to be taken in its eventuality, i.e. which of the partners will need to take what action. Some emergency measures can be planned and practiced beforehand, for example through role-play and first aid courses. It is especially important that the support system for participants and the staff accompanying them abroad are clearly set out.

5.4 Implementation phase

Disadvantaged youth and young adults are likely to require more support during their placement than other participants. This requires putting in place an adequate support framework. In general we can distinguish between active and passive supervision. Active supervision involves taking proactive action to pre-empt possible problems; passive supervision means establishing the basis of dealing with problems that participants are unable to cope with themselves. Too much active supervision can fail to create a “free space”. Whichever choice is made, permanent contact people in the home and hosting country are essential.

Some projects send a member of staff along for the whole duration of the stay, as this is deemed essential for successful outcomes. Others have trusted local contact people who can intervene in the event of problems that participants can't handle on their own. Some programmes have no provisions for supervision during the stay. Some projects also have a kind of “remote supervising” in which participants contact their guidance counsellors at least once a week to report on progress, either by telephone or e-mail. Failure to do so may be punished by the guidance counsellor withholding grant from the participant until he or she reports back.

5.4.1 Organising opportunities to reflect on experiences

It is important that participants have opportunities to reflect on the progress they are making during their stay and have support to enable them to make sure they achieve their objectives as set out in their learning plans. Day-to-day issues, homesickness and other problems can overshadow core learning issues. Mentors have a key role to play in making sure learners have the space they need. It is important that the ratio of mentors to participants is agreed in line with the needs of the particular group involved as some groups will need more support than

others. Regular discussions should be held and scheduled in advance. They should be supplemented with participants writing weekly reports either in their mother tongue or the language of their host country. Other methods can be used including learning diaries, group discussions and blogs. Mentors need a certain level of competence particularly in intercultural skills in order to execute their functions effectively.

5.4.2 Dealing with conflicts

Conflicts are likely to be a particular issue with disadvantaged youth and young adults. Handled properly, they can become opportunities for learning and competence development. A range of techniques can be effective in helping to handle conflict situations including immediate action by local mentors to calm situations, but also involving terminations of placements where there have been serious breaches of rules, free example through drug abuse, refusals to work. As part of their risk management plans, partners can put in place escalation processes to deal with different grades of conflict and which are made clear to participants.

5.4.3 Role of the transnational partner

Transnational partners have important roles to play in making placements successful. They can provide the mentors described above and have an important role in conflict management. They can also develop the local support programme. Cultural and leisure activities should not be seen as “add-ons” to placements but as an integral and vital parts of participants' overall experience. Joint social events with local people and language workshops can help to develop a sense of community and also help to keep people motivated.

Establishing regular and effective communication with partners is essential. Protocols are needed for regular communication, along with establishing effective channels of communication on ad hoc issues.

5.5 Follow-up phase

As noted, this phase is generally reckoned to be the most under-developed component of most mobility programmes (add references to Cedefop 2004 and Move it report 2007). However, it is also regarded as being important for the entire learning process, especially where a programme has been purposefully designed to give participants new prospects on the labour market. Where developments in personality or vocational orientation have begun during the placement, participants may need support and guidance to cling onto the developments and act on them, especially where the placement has been of short duration and therefore where there has been not much time for changes to become habituated. This is important as these changes may be difficult for participants to maintain when they return to their original environments and are met with the former image of themselves as reflected in others' expectations of them.

5.5.1 Organising reflections on experiences gained abroad

To reflect on their experiences, participants can talk through their stay abroad with a counsellor and discuss the consequences for their future career path. To be most effective, such discussions should be well structured, evaluating the mobility period against the learning plan and looking forwards to how to find employment drawing on the competences that have been acquired or improved. Undertaking self-assessment as a complement to such sessions

can have a strong motivational effect on participants.

An important if less sophisticated aspect of debriefing is helping participants to put into words their experiences, thus making them conscious of what has actually happened. This can be done for example through appreciative enquiry. Getting participants to brief new applicants can also make them think systematically about what has happened and to answer questions from an interested and committed audience.

Participants can also be provided with further practical assistance, for example being given help to make job/training applications, and being shown how to make the most use of Europass and employer testimonials.

As noted above, the issue of how competencies acquired are to be formally recognised should have been set out at the start of the placement. At this point, recognition processes will need to be put into action.

5.5.2 Stakeholders to involve in follow-up activity

A range of stakeholders should be involved to maximise the return to participants of their involvement in their mobility periods. Strong links between the organisation leading the mobility activities and relevant employment agencies or job centres is very important where employment is the goal. Where further training is required, organisations with a role in validation and recognition of competencies acquired will need to be involved, along with local education and training providers who may be involved in providing special access to further education and training.

5.6 Networking

Networking involves the forging of relationships between projects. Another Working Group is dealing with the issue of the internal structure of partnerships, e.g. roles and responsibilities, structures, reporting arrangements etc. Networking is a key feature of many ESF programmes and has been shown to deliver a variety of benefits.

Within Member States, networking involves reaching out beyond the group of partners directly involved in the mobility activities. There is a wider group of players who need to be involved in mobility activities if they are to be fully successful. In particular, agencies and organisations involved in the labour market, such as employment agencies, job centres and employers perform vital functions. They can help projects to keep in touch with the needs on the labour market during the planning stage, and they can facilitate the process of placing participants into work once they have completed their mobility periods.

At international level, networking can play an important role help in the exchange of knowledge. Networking can help to deal with ad hoc needs as they arise on specific topics, such as how to manage conflict situations or how to effectively organise placements.

To facilitate effective networking, programmes need to establish high quality communication processes, clearly defined responsibilities, and reporting that provides partners with continuous and transparent information.