

PANORAMA

Transparency of vocational qualifications

The Leonardo da Vinci approach

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Jens Bjørnåvold
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Foreword

The right of European citizens to live and work in other Member States is fundamental to the achievement of full economic union and social integration. Despite the gradual removal of restrictions to mobility, transfer of skills from one Member State to another still poses problems.

This report attempts to give a brief overview of the situation within the area of transparency of vocational qualifications. The aim is to contribute to work on removing obstacles to mobility due to lack of transparency of vocational qualifications. This is done by presenting measures introduced at Community level and by drawing attention to projects within the Leonardo da Vinci programme dealing with the issue.

The Leonardo da Vinci programme is the most recent and by far the most influential initiative towards increased transparency of qualifications, inviting thousands of partnerships all over Europe to experiment and, if possible, introduce new methods and approaches along paths partly defined by themselves. The potential of the programme is apparent, but as shown in the report, what is more uncertain is how efficient the approaches are in terms of securing more permanent solutions and support for those individuals wishing to transfer their qualifications from one country to another.

It is our hope that this report will contribute to further development in the field, serving individuals as well as enterprises throughout Europe.

Stavros Stavrou
Deputy Director

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Executive summary

1. Introduction

Transparency of qualifications can be defined as the 'degree of visibility necessary to identify and compare the value and content of qualifications at sectoral as well as regional, national and international levels' ⁽¹⁾. The demand for visibility concerns legal prerequisites plus information about the real substance of a given training sequence, making it possible to identify differences and similarities between qualifications from different countries.

This report attempts to give a brief overview of the situation within the area of transparency of vocational qualifications. The aim is to contribute to work on removing obstacles to mobility due to lack of transparency by presenting measures introduced at Community level and by drawing attention to relevant projects within the Leonardo da Vinci programme which were launched during 1995, 1996 and 1997 respectively.

2. The legal corpus

The legal corpus (i.e. Community-level measures, directives, resolutions etc.) dealing with issues of comparability and transparency has been developed over a period of approximately forty years. Different principles have been applied and different levels of education and training have been addressed. Although valid in legal terms, the political and practical importance of the initiatives presented vary somewhat.

The directives covering health education are still important and accepted prerequisites for mobility within this segment of the labour market. It is worth noting, however, that the professions in question are, relatively speaking, homogenous, and that the legal regulations are based on a *de facto* harmonisation supported both through national authorities and professional bodies.

The general directives on university education and higher professional education have also become accepted legal prerequisites for the mobility of people with post upper-secondary qualifications. Evaluations show that the number of cases handled through the general system is relatively limited (and varies between countries). It must be added, though, that these are the problematic cases. Generally speaking, there is reason to believe that the principle of mutual trust introduced in the directives is accepted. However, as in the case of medical professions, this may be linked to the relative homogeneity of university education and the element of shared traditions existing within this part of the educational system, irrespective of country.

⁽¹⁾ Cedefop - European Centre for the Development of Vocational Training. Glossary, proposed by Cedefop, January 1999, p. 17.

The Council Decision of 1985 ⁽²⁾ and Council Resolution of 1990 ⁽³⁾, focusing on comparability of vocational training qualifications are, legally speaking, still valid. Practical and political support for attempts to introduce an official and common format for the comparison of vocational qualifications has been abandoned. This is partly a result of practical problems faced by such an approach but perhaps even more of its political implications; the introduction of such a common format could lead to certain (indirect) harmonisation and standardisation, conflicting with the principle of national governance of education and training. The practical and political problems faced by the comparability 'exercises' illustrate the relative heterogeneity of vocational qualifications compared with higher education. The scope and variety of training models and qualification profiles is much higher in this segment of education and training. This, of course, is not necessarily something negative. Variance may be an expression of tailored solutions meeting specific demands at national and regional levels. This also shows that transparency is important but not the same as standardisation or even harmonisation.

Council Resolutions 1992 and 1996 can be looked upon as a critique of the comparability approach. Both emphasise the principle of national governance and support voluntary initiatives such as the development of standard formats for the issuing of certificates and translation of certificates into several languages. These resolutions are still valid and closely linked to current political consensus in the area. The practical suggestions made in 1992 and 1996, however, have not received the same attention in all Member States.

Council Resolution 1992 ⁽⁴⁾ concludes that there is doubt as to whether the work done provides the kind of information necessary to promote free movement of labour. The resolution thus indicates the need for new directions in the work towards transparency of qualifications. It focuses on the need for individuals to take into account a broad perspective on qualifications. It also introduces 'individual portfolios' as a possible source of information and exemplifies means such as common qualification formats. It encourages initiatives by Member States for reciprocal information on qualifications and systems.

⁽²⁾ Council Decision of 16 July 1985 on the comparability of vocational qualifications in the Member States of the European Community, (85/368/EEC), OJ L 199, 31.7.1985.

⁽³⁾ Council Resolution of 18 December 1990 on the comparability of vocational qualifications, (91/C 109/01), OJ C109 24.4.1991, p. 0001-0002.

⁽⁴⁾ Council Resolution of 3 December 1992 on transparency of qualifications, (93/ C 49/01), OJ C 49, 19.3.1993.

Council Resolution 1996 ⁽⁵⁾ calls on Member States to promote increased transparency by introducing a common format for certificates where the following information should be presented:

- (a) an indication of the body issuing the certificate and its status in law;
- (b) indication of the identity of the holder of the certificate;
- (c) indication of the purpose, duration and content of the training;
- (d) a description of the qualifications obtained;
- (e) indication of the final results of the courses followed; and,
- (f) information on the validity of the certificates as regards access to certain occupations and/or further training courses.

The resolution also expresses a wish to promote the measures necessary for issuing vocational training certificates in other Community languages.

3. Profile of transparency projects within the Leonardo da Vinci programme

Following termination of efforts to evolve a 'comparability system' the Leonardo da Vinci programme can be seen as the most recent and by far most influential initiative towards increased transparency of vocational qualifications. While covering a wide range of topics, the council decision introducing the Leonardo da Vinci programme ⁽⁶⁾ underlines the importance of the issue of transparency of vocational qualifications.

The principles applied in the Leonardo approach are different from those of prior initiatives. Instead of introducing a central political and/or legal regulation, thousands of partnerships all over Europe were invited to experiment, and if possible, introduce new methods and approaches along paths defined (in part) by themselves. The potential of this approach, in terms of uncovering a wide range of possible solutions, is apparent. What is more uncertain is how efficient this approach is in terms of securing permanent solutions and practical support for those individuals wishing to transfer qualifications from one country to another.

Thus, promoting transparency within such a framework is more a matter of broad involvement rather than enforcing a formal framework. The critical question facing this paradoxical blend of grand objectives and volunteerism, is whether it is possible to achieve significant progress by such means. A reasonable hypothesis would be that a voluntary approach must meet certain minimum requirements linked to volume (number and scope), and

⁽⁵⁾ Council Resolution of 15 July 1996 on the transparency of vocational training certificates, (96/C 224/04), OJ C 224, 1.8.1996, p. 0007-0008.

⁽⁶⁾ Council Decision of 6 December 1994 establishing an action programme for the implementation of a European Community vocational training policy, (94/819/EC), OJ L 340, 29.12.1994.

profile (sectoral, professional) of initiatives to succeed. A small number of isolated initiatives will make no difference to those individuals trying to transfer qualifications from one (national, sectoral) context to another. An open European area of qualifications, if it is to be based on voluntary exchange of information and experience, must be further based on a massive input of resources, ideas, experiments and committed participants. If this was the case, individuals could be served in a better way than they are at present.

The table below gives an overview of the number of projects within the Leonardo da Vinci programme as a whole, and those dealing with the transparency issue.

	1995	1996	1997	Total
Total number of projects	749	793	730	2 272
Placement and exchange programmes	121	170	188	479
Pilot projects	581	582	495	1 658
Survey and analyses projects	47	41	47	135
Projects on transparency (total number)	79	75	72	226
Projects with a general focus	16	17	23	56
Projects with a sector focus ⁽⁷⁾	63	58	49	170
Primary	2	4	3	9
Secondary	41	17	26	84
Tertiary	20	37	20	77

A total of 226 out of 1 793 projects (the placement and exchange programme is not included) have been identified as dealing with transparency of vocational qualifications almost equally spread over the three-year period studied. More than three-quarters of these have a sector focus of which only a few have been found in the primary sector (agriculture, forestry, and fishing). Fifty-six projects have a general focus covering different educational fields. Obviously there is a certain volume and a certain profile in the programme.

⁽⁷⁾ In this table we have applied a simple division between primary, secondary and tertiary sectors.

Projects with a general focus

Projects working on a general level in the 1995 batch, have been grouped under six different approaches:

- (a) comparability,
- (b) database,
- (c) reference centre,
- (d) certificate supplement,
- (e) assessment, and
- (f) quality standard.

These general approaches to transparency identified in 1995, have been followed up by the 1996 and the 1997 projects. The focus has narrowed and projects tend to combine work on strategies of assessment with certification and recognition procedures, making it logical to combine these two approaches. Two main approaches remain dominant: the assessment/certification approach and the quality standard approach. The first comprises work on establishing common European certification formats/frameworks, normally combined with the development of assessment methodologies. The second approach focuses on training institutions and contains projects aimed at creating instruments for comparison of the quality of their training.

On the basis of experience from projects working on a general level we can conclude that the Leonardo programme has been successful in bringing forward committed partnerships, ideas and suggestions for practical solutions, but at the same time represents a major challenge to more efficient dissemination of results and an improved link to potential users of project results. In most cases projects have spent relatively limited amounts of time and energy on the dissemination of results.

Projects with a sector focus

Compared to the group of projects working on a general level, the homogeneity of the sectoral projects is striking. While we have been able to identify different approaches to transparency in the group of general projects, we can identify one basic model applied by the projects in the sectoral group. Some minor differences exist, but the objectives, along with working methods, are almost identical from project to project. The 'ideal typical' sectoral project can be described in the following way:

- (a) the general objective is to support sectoral convergence in the area of training, initial and/or continuing training, in the sector. A majority of projects envisage a 'European' training approach as their final objective;
- (b) the first step is to initiate an investigation/survey into the skills needs and current skills supply (quantity) in the sector;

- (c) the second step is to initiate an analysis of existing training practices in the sector, both in terms of substance and curricula and in terms of pedagogical approaches and training tools;
- (d) the third step consists of an outlining of relevant qualification criteria for the sector, often the development of specific European curricula;
- (e) the fourth step consists of the development of assessment and validation methodologies. These methodologies are necessary in order to identify skills needs on individual and enterprise levels;
- (f) the fifth step consists of the development of training modules on the basis of the steps described above, including manuals for trainers and for self-training;
- (g) the sixth step consists of the development of 'training tools' normally in the form of CD-Roms, videos and internet web pages;
- (h) the last step consists of the testing of these modules and tools in the partner countries.

It might be added that another element often consists of methods or tools for certification.

Not all projects cover all elements. Some variations exist as to the emphasis on the different points but this does not affect the basic model outlined above. The 1996 projects, reflecting the emphasis of the call for tender, have a stronger focus on assessment and recognition of prior and/or non-formal learning. In most cases this is intrinsically linked to the development of common (European or international) qualification requirements and standards. As in 1996, questions of qualification requirements, qualification standards and assessment methodologies/systems stay to the fore in the 1997 projects. Again this is intended to form the basis for the development of training modules applicable at European level.

A conclusion

Comparing the objectives and profiles of the 1995, 1996 and 1997 projects, a certain uniformity can be observed. This is especially the case for those projects working on sectoral or occupational levels. Most projects try to proceed from an analysis of the current level of qualifications and competences towards a shared (European) set of qualification requirements. This basis, which can be given many names (qualification standard is one), is then used for the development of assessment procedures, curriculum elements, training modules and certification systems. Obviously there is a commitment to create something useful, which can inspire action, and judgement in a coherent way and from shared points of departure. The high number of participants involved, together with their close link to the occupational fields in question, is a crucial part of the Leonardo 'exercise.'

The sectoral projects combine a genuine 'bottom up' approach with the clear objective of European harmonisation and standardisation of vocational qualifications. This voluntary approach towards convergence is interesting, especially in a situation where harmonisation by political/legal means is ruled out.

More than 50 different sectors/occupations are covered in the three years studied, involving a broad spectrum of the economy from agriculture to public services.

The fact that projects basically work according to the same model and objectives, irrespective of sectoral and occupational differences, may be interpreted in two ways. Firstly, the predominating focus on qualification requirements, qualification standards, assessment methodologies and certification systems may be looked upon as an expression of actual needs experienced at individual or enterprise level. Secondly, the predominating focus can be looked upon as a reflection of the call for tender more than a reflection of a need experienced by individuals or enterprises. Whatever the balance between these two interpretations, a programme like Leonardo da Vinci is able to set the agenda in a very distinct and consequential way. This is clearly proved by the number of sectors and occupations working in this area.

4. Results and impacts of the Leonardo da Vinci programme

Introduction

The results and impact of the projects have been studied through an analysis of the experiences of a sample of projects (approximately 10 % of the projects launched during the years 1995, 1996 and 1997).

Transnational work, depending on confidence and a minimum of consensus, is time consuming. The Leonardo da Vinci projects operate (mostly) over a three-year period and results must be viewed accordingly. Given the timespan, we can observe projects that succeed to a greater or lesser degree. A number of them have failed to survive the first year. Others have been forced to seek new partners, adjust their scope, etc., while a substantial number have been able to reach the basic objectives outlined from the start. Important 'success factors' seem to be a well-defined and well-delimited area of work, making consensus-building relatively easy, along with working in areas where the need for solutions is strong.

Our aim is to try to identify the factors relevant and crucial to understanding the work process and the final outcome of projects. The following three main questions have been applied to the material:

- (a) what are the main characteristics of the results achieved?
- (b) what are the typical features of the development of projects?
- (c) which main factors influence the work and results of projects?

Main characteristics of results

Initially we would like to stress that 'final' results and effects of the Leonardo da Vinci programme are not yet in place, and, in several cases, are not even in short-term perspective.

There are various products available from the projects. Printed material is abundant, together with information given during conferences. There are electronic versions of reports and booklets, promotional material such as leaflets, brochures, etc., and, in a few cases, exhibitions. Many projects can be found on the Internet having a website of their own. The majority of these, however, contain only general information on the work and the partners involved. A few comprise useful tools or final results.

A vast number of descriptions of the partners' different educational systems, as well as training modules, are produced by the projects. In an early stage of the work, partners' points of departure are described within the framework of the project and, in a later stage, the process of how actions are agreed upon in order to cope with the problem in focus. The first step mentioned gives descriptive data (mainly of the partners' training systems) and the second provides training modules, aimed for use on a European level. A majority of the projects report increased understanding, new levels of understanding and appreciation and respect for a partner's way of thinking.

To sum up we may say that a certain number of projects constituting a certain profile have focused on the relevant issues and produced a huge quantity of results. Mostly, what was aimed for at the outset has been achieved, even if not in a streamlined way and without adjustments. There are many analyses of different parts of the VET systems in Europe, numerous training modules and accompanying assessments and certification procedures produced and an improvement in the understanding of diversity within the Community. Yet, it must be noted that, if projects are to be considered successful in terms of their use and application of results, then there is certainly room for improvement. To have real access to results from 'outside,' as we have experienced, is both difficult and time consuming.

Features of development

The following elements have been identified as typical main features of the development of projects within the stock of projects studied:

- (a) changing of ambitions,
- (b) strengthening of management,
- (c) prolongation of projects,
- (d) discontinuation of work.

The elements can be seen as different ways of coping with problems and are mainly connected to projects which do not follow plans in a streamlined way. It is fair to say that

changes in relation to plans are more common than no changes and that (a) and (b) occur more frequently than (c) and (d). Changes, however, are to be expected and should not be seen as a purely negative circumstance. In many cases it stems from adjustments due to increased understanding and under-way findings. Several elements might of course be found in single projects.

For example, goal retreats, quantitatively or qualitatively, automatically reduce the level of ambition, as does spending less time and resources on empirical work or on anchoring activities outside the inner circle of the project. There are also examples implying reduced ambitions of the final product of projects. An impression is that diversities, hierarchical and/or cultural, have a strong impact on change, meaning decreased levels of ambitions. One project could not finish the work and recommended a certain curriculum plan because of lack of political legitimacy in one Member State. Another reduced their ambitions by publishing a discussion paper instead of a recommendation. A third failed to agree on procedures and conditions for commercialisation of their results, and so on.

Factors influencing the work process

The development of any project is, of course, dependent on factors inside and outside the project which influence the work process itself. On the issue of influence, we have identified four main factors. These form parts of the frames within which the work process takes place and implies constraints as well as prospects:

- (a) the specificity of the research questions;
- (b) the balancing of different interests;
- (c) the regulation complex;
- (d) random and accidental factors.

Some of the factors involve what could be described as material or basic prerequisites. Others have a more organisational and ideological character. As far as the first three above-mentioned factors are concerned, they can have either a positive or negative dimension. The fourth group has mainly negative consequences on the project work.

The definition and limitation of the area of work, or the specificity of the research questions, seems to be a crucial factor for success. One aspect of this is the extent to which expected results find a specific user. Too wide a scope or unclear borders of the area of work cause difficulties. This is especially the case in a multicultural context.

Important factors influencing the work of the Leonardo da Vinci programme seem to relate to the base from which the work is launched, the problems or questions dealt with and the shared interests of partners. Not surprisingly, the same goes for all research-oriented and developmental work but the international arena demands specificity, visibility and clarity in those respects.

It is important that the possibilities are good enough to establish a fruitful balance of interests; both national and transnational and the degree to which common solutions are needed. An important part of this seems to be the potential use of results, which stresses the need for a user perspective in the work. A variation on this theme is to build in flexibility within the approach chosen.

A conclusion

The projects we have studied seek to increase transparency in some way or within a certain field. In that respect they are all instrumental but their focus differs as do their approaches to the problem. As far as we can see, and as reflected by the project stock, there are two main ways to proceed. One is to work on understanding differences and to find general models to build on, e.g. certificates or certificate supplements. The other is to start at the input side and focus on the content and structure of training. Often the work is limited to part of the system and linked to a specific area or sector, making any overall solution difficult to pinpoint.

During the process of work, a polarisation seems to occur. General approaches grow towards even more general levels and projects with ambitions to solve problems through work, within certain curriculum fields, have to make goal retreats to become more specific. There are several factors at work here, mainly, budgetary restrictions, cultural diversities and the project form itself. To solve a complex problem in a multicultural context on a tight budget within a limited period of time, means you have to simplify by taking the problem to a more general level or by reducing ambitions and scope. In turn, this decreases the opportunity to focus on dissemination and implementation of findings within given frames.

Consequently, the impact of projects will rely very much on what happens after the project period has ended, especially if a project has concentrated on a limited element within fields governed by political considerations and decisions. The need for a political context able to evaluate and implement results should not be underestimated.

In the following we will give an example of one option for dissemination and use of Leonardo da Vinci projects by establishing a specific tool where technical and political aspects of the issue can be combined.

5. The European Forum in the field of transparency of vocational qualifications

In November 1998 the European forum on transparency of vocational qualifications was established as a joint initiative of the European Commission and Cedefop to meet the needs of new concrete actions in the field. The role of the forum was:

- (a) to explore ways of removing obstacles to mobility due to lack of transparency of vocational qualifications;
- (b) to initiate an open-minded dialogue on how to utilise existing initiatives, instruments and institutions in a better way;
- (c) to elaborate on how to implement existing political solutions in a way which actually supports individual citizens and institutions;
- (d) to consider the need for new technical and political initiatives.

It was intended that the forum would create a meeting place where representatives from the Member States of the EU/EEA, the social partners, the European Commission, the European training foundation (ETF) and Cedefop, face up to challenges in a more comprehensive way than before. The aim was to indicate possible practical solutions on the transparency issue to be considered by political authorities at Community, Member State or social partner levels.

The management board of Cedefop, representing ministries as well as the social partners, was asked to appoint representatives capable of communicating effectively with policy-makers at different levels as members of the forum. One person from each country and four from the social partners were appointed. All together, the group comprises about 30 persons.

The role of the European forum to use and utilise existing initiatives and find practical solutions; this also implies the function of acting as a tool to disseminate and implement the results of the Leonardo da Vinci programme dealing with the issue of transparency.

The problem faced by the European forum on transparency is not purely a technical problem, but one with social and political bearings. The concept of transparency has a history and solutions exist based on research as well as council resolutions and recommendations. But few have paid attention to or implemented the existing legal framework. The European forum seems to have been able to unite different levels in the system and to find practical solutions which Member States and the social partners can accept and support. Two main measures have been proposed - a certificate supplement and a network of national reference points - both aiming at increased transparency of individual vocational qualifications.

At the moment (August 2000) there is process under way which seeks possible ways of placing what the transparency forum has agreed upon into the decision-making structure of the European Union. Most likely the forum's proposals will be included as part of a Council and Parliament recommendation on mobility and decided upon during the French presidency in the second half of the year 2000. If the procedures for approval of a mobility

recommendation come to fruition as planned, the work of the European forum should be viewed as a successful implementation of the Leonardo da Vinci projects involved.

By establishing a meeting place designed for dialogue and mutual exchange of ideas, a tool has been created for steering the desire for increased transparency in a way that mirrors the complexity of the problem while also resulting in implementation of project results. The members of the forum taking part in these dialogues hold positions in the Member States enabling them to speak on behalf of the states and to take the results back home. The support given to them consists mainly of summaries and overviews on what is already known or has already been done. Awareness of what is possible and not possible, by what means, at what time and in which contexts, has increased throughout the conversations, leading to optimal use of experiences and knowledge in the field. We have not seen the final results yet (August 2000), but what we have seen looks promising.

The European forum in the field of vocational qualifications can be seen as one possible approach to the dissemination and implementation of the Leonardo da Vinci programme. Both main measures proposed by the forum build on results from Leonardo projects, thus taking them from an experimental to an implementation stage. Means and competences outside projects have been added, so obviously the interaction between different levels and different contexts has been fruitful in leading to use of the work produced in an experimental setting. It should be noted that the projects used in this exercise were those that worked on what we call a 'general level.' Potential for further work lies in projects with a sector approach. These constitute the majority of projects on transparency of vocational qualifications in the Leonardo da Vinci programme.

6. Conclusions

As illustrated in our discussion of the 1995, 1996 and 1997 projects, the Leonardo da Vinci programme has increased and broadened the work related to the issue of transparency in a significant way. We have identified 226 projects which in some way work according to objectives relevant to the question of how to transfer qualifications and competences from one context to another (enterprise, occupation, sector, nation).

This emphasis on transparency is clearly linked to the political standpoints represented in the 1992 and 1996 council resolutions presented in the first part of the report. Projects are promoted to bring forward voluntary cooperation and practical solutions in the form of instruments, methodologies and systems supporting increased transparency of qualifications.

However, the programme seems to transcend the political perspectives presented in these resolutions. This is first and foremost exemplified through the high number of projects working on sectoral level, supporting the development of harmonised qualification profiles on a European level. Several of these projects operate within areas which may be labelled as 'new technologies' and 'new services,' indicating that a certain standardisation and harmonisation

process is occurring from below. Still, the majority of projects aiming at harmonisation at European level work within traditional occupations, sectors and branches.

This is an interesting and new tendency and shows that the traditional legal approach, in its various forms, is supplemented by an alternative voluntary and industry-driven approach.

The experiences and results from the sector-based projects are extensive. A large number of tools aimed at increased transparency have been developed. Teaching modules within different fields and occupations, as well as other types of curriculum material, form a major category. Connected to these are assessment tools and recommendations on recognition and certification criteria. Text produced on paper and/or electronically would easily fill several bookshelves and hard drives. Perhaps more important is the mutual learning coming from projects which, in many cases, has led to increased understanding of differences and different ways of thinking between countries. Almost all projects report that they have learned a lot, become better acquainted and developed a growing awareness of the complexities in the field. In the long-term perspective this is a promising result. Projects with a general focus share the experiences of positive commitment and hard work among partners. Their main results are less specific than those stemming from the sector projects. They give sample recommendations and frames of reference to be further considered by Member States and the Community. Also, these projects have produced useful and interesting material, thus assisting the move towards increased transparency of vocational qualifications. Several of them have been of use to the European forum on transparency.

Those close to the projects of the Leonardo da Vinci programme are very much aware of the limitations of the project form. The projects can be characterised as 'case studies,' operating on the basis of (relatively) low budgets, a limited time scale, and having limited impact on decision-making processes in enterprises as well as in the public realm. They can, however, highlight and illuminate the wider context of the issue, show possible action alternatives and underline the potential for development.

Those involved stress the element of trust inherent in the projects. In most cases, the partnerships are crucial in developing trust and understanding where this did not exist before. While difficult to measure, this element may be consequential for the long-term success of this work. We see several examples of project partnerships developing into new partnerships in other areas. This is not only because people try to accumulate resources, but also because genuine cooperation has been initiated.

The nature and balance of partnerships is crucial. The competence of people involved is important, but even more important is the institutional base of the partners. The projects can be characterised as 'development agents' and rely on their ability to 'sell' a solution to relevant users and 'buyers.' If the objective is to accomplish change, partners isolated from their respective national contexts can present a problem.

Projects need to exchange ideas and experiences with people and institutions facing parallel challenges. Such an exchange of ideas and experiences could have been accomplished within the Leonardo programme itself, but this has only partly taken place. Synergy could be supported by using a 'clustering strategy,' allowing related projects to cooperate. The initiatives from the Commission in 1996 in this direction were positive, but need to be improved both as to the selection of cooperating projects and the working forms applied. The European forum in the field of transparency of vocational qualifications represents one possible way of working.

Potentially good results from a Leonardo project have to build on an in-depth dialogue where rationales are made explicit, there is a good overview of local as well as central policies and there are good dissemination strategies on different levels. A project has to 'compete for attention,' it cannot take for granted that a good idea will be welcomed by those parts of the institutional establishment responsible for implementation. Obviously they need support in this respect.

The Leonardo da Vinci approach can be looked upon as an effort to create something supranational from a bottom-up position. The legitimacy of solutions will be much better if they reflect actual needs identified by real users. A problem, though, will be the implementation of results outside the project group. Dissemination strategies and links to decision-making bodies are crucial elements if good project ideas are to be transformed into permanent solutions.

We see projects coping successfully with these challenges but this is not necessarily the case when taking the whole picture into account. This is especially true when it comes to dissemination strategies and links to decision-making bodies. According to our observations, different factors create a tendency towards less emphasis on dissemination or broader use of results during the project process. This can partly be explained by the fact that a limited timeframe is used to achieve the results in the first place. Moreover, it is possible to question whether the dissemination issue is a primary responsibility of single projects. Their bases of work are confined to certain areas, their scope specialised and their frames of reference more focused on a specific issue, as opposed to the overall context containing that specific issue. In addition, the projects are expert-oriented in a field where final decisions have to be taken on a political level taking into account financial as well as ideological conditions. Perhaps one strategy could be leaving the 'use of the results' problem to a next stage and in the hands of those who ultimately will make the final decisions.

Generally speaking, the success of a project can be said to depend on four distinct stages demanding different methodologies of work, different judgements and different links to the social and political context.

Firstly, we can identify a descriptive stage. Most of the projects discussed so far have covered this stage. The description and analysis of the current situation or problem is the common

starting point for the majority of projects in the programme. This is clearly illustrated in the 'working model' described on the basis of the 1995 sectoral projects.

Secondly, we can identify a learning stage. This learning stage is an important and visible part of the projects studied. By gathering project partners from different countries and institutional settings, an immediate exchange of experiences and points of view is begun. The quality of this learning stage clearly varies. The ability to define a common perspective is, however, crucial if practical results are to be achieved.

Thirdly, successful descriptive and learning stages make it possible to identify controversial issues. This is what we may term the normative stage. Finding practical solutions is also a question of deciding between different preferences, values and perspectives. Successful implementation may depend on a willingness to identify these controversial elements of the project and a further willingness to enter a process of 'negotiation' in order to find a solution.

Lastly, entering the decision stage internally in the project, questions of consensus and legitimacy become increasingly important. We can identify a distinction between situations where participants try to avoid predefined conclusions (in order to reach solutions as optimal and acceptable as possible) and situations where participants negotiate on the basis of predefined conclusions. At this stage, implementation depends on the ability of project-partners to link to the relevant external context and their ability to 'sell' project-internal decisions to the relevant external context.

It is our impression that the main emphasis of the Leonardo da Vinci programme is on the first two stages and less so on the remaining two. This leads to an obvious risk that solutions will be confined to the archives.

Much of the work is sector-based and reflects a tendency towards increased interest in, and pressure on, VET from industry as well as service and public sectors. Making use of a distinction between arenas for formulation and others for realisation of educational goals, we can state that there is a growing number of formulation arenas. Traditionally, goals, setting and steering educational systems, have been the responsibility of the state in cooperation with the social partners in most European countries. With the huge Leonardo da Vinci programme, formulations of aims and objectives, as well as curricula for vocational education and training, are being carried out on a broad basis in different settings. Arenas of formulation not only have a central localisation, they can also be found on local or sector levels. Evidently, this can lead to improvements and innovation if directed properly. The development reflects the general tendency towards decentralisation and deregulation dominating many of the educational systems in Europe.

Our impression of the projects in the Leonardo programme is that less emphasis is put on dissemination and use of results than on producing products. The European forum in the field of transparency of vocational qualifications constitutes an interesting example of how to

achieve consensus and get practical concrete results on a European level. In the work of the forum it has been possible to benefit from experiences of the Leonardo programme in the effort to improve transparency through certificate supplements and information networks.

Today's situation is characterised by a multitude of interesting projects, committed participants, and a growing amount of valuable information and experience on national and European levels. Both Member States and Community institutions should address these challenges in the coming period. Such focus is necessary if the work of the Leonardo da Vinci programme is to result in practical solutions serving individuals as well as enterprises throughout Europe.

1. General background and aims

In the 1996 green paper 'Education, training research: The obstacles to transnational mobility' the following is stated: ⁽⁸⁾

'Europe has now become an open area where, in principle, it is possible for all citizens of the European Community to move from one country to another, as an integral part of a unified whole. It is therefore essential that freedom of movement should be guaranteed for all without hindrance.

...

Personal mobility is a vital element of the European Community's investment in human resources, which is seen as one of the keys to successfully meeting the economic, social and cultural challenges of the 21st century.

...

Transnational mobility affords greater scope for education, training and research, and opens the door to the transfer of personal skills and knowledge, particularly in innovative areas such as new technologies, new management methods and organisation of work... It gives each individual the opportunity to acquire theoretical, practical and behavioural knowledge and, more broadly, skills and qualifications suited to the single market.'

Freedom of movement for people within the European Union is one of the most tangible results of the achievement of a Community frontier-free area. This freedom of movement and residence helps strengthen a feeling of belonging, which is a precondition for the emergence of a truly European citizenship. Yet, labour force mobility (as one form of mobility) within the European Union is relatively limited. In 1995, 2 % of the European labour force lived in a country other than that of their origin. There are variations between countries, but generally, labour market mobility is still low. There are, however, indications that mobility in international companies and frontier mobility have increased. The EU labour force survey of 1995 shows that the qualifications of mobile workers, job status and working hour regulations do not differ to any major extent from those of non-mobile workers. It can also be added that there is mobility of enterprises between Member States ⁽⁹⁾.

This situation can be contrasted with a survey carried out in 1994 revealing that 44 % of Europeans are indeed prepared to work abroad. But they do not. This can be seen as an indirect reference to high transaction and social costs, but also to obstacles in the exchange of information and recognition of qualifications. In effect, while it is today legally possible for every citizen of a Community Member State to establish himself or herself in another Member State to pursue his or her occupation, obstacles to mobility arise when it comes to having vocational qualifications and training recognised.

⁽⁸⁾ European Commission, 1996, Education, training, research: The obstacles to transnational mobility. Green paper. Bulletin of the European Union. Supplement 5/96, p. 11f.

⁽⁹⁾ Eurostat, 1995, Labour Force Survey. European Commission, Luxembourg.

For non-regulated professions there is no legal obstacle to work in another Member State. But, actually, the transfer of skills from one Member State to another still represents a problem. Despite the absence of legal obstacles, host countries may be unfamiliar with the practitioner's 'foreign qualifications'. Furthermore, the descriptions/titles of professions and certificates cover neither the same content nor the same levels of skill. National training and certification systems are based on very different rationales. Improving the information on existing national training arrangements can reduce this hindrance and provide a better basis for comparison and understanding.

Lack of information and understanding makes the transfer of qualifications from one nation to another or from one field of work to another, or even from one region to another, more difficult than necessary. Transparency of qualifications can be defined as the 'the degree of visibility necessary to identify and compare the value and content of qualifications at sectoral as well as regional, national and international level'.⁽¹⁰⁾ The demand for visibility concerns legal prerequisites plus information about the real substance of a given training sequence, making it possible to identify differences and similarities between qualifications from different countries.

This report attempts to give a brief overview of the situation within the area of transparency of vocational qualifications. The aim is to contribute to work on removing obstacles to mobility due to lack of transparency, by presenting measures introduced at Community level and by drawing attention to the relevant projects within the Leonardo da Vinci programme.

Many possible solutions have been suggested by those Leonardo da Vinci projects working in this field. If not disseminated and utilised, there is a danger that these ideas and initiatives will disappear as soon as the projects are finalised. It is also important to link the work within the Leonardo programme to the general legal and political framework introduced within the European Union. Hopefully, this report can contribute to such a link.

In Chapter 2, we outline a current overview on legal and political measures at community level. Chapter 3 gives a general introduction to the Leonardo da Vinci programme followed by three chapters (4, 5 and 6) focusing mainly on the aims and objectives of the projects to establish a profile. This first step of the analysis is summarised in Chapter 7. A second step is taken in Chapter 8, where results and impacts of the projects are in focus and logically followed by Chapter 9, comprising a discussion on the European forum on transparency of vocational qualifications as a tool for dissemination and implementation of results. Chapter 10 concludes the report.

⁽¹⁰⁾ Cedefop, 1999, Glossary, proposed by Cedefop, January 1999, p. 17.

2. Centralised efforts - Community level measures

2.1. Introduction

During the four decades following the Treaty of Rome of 1957, several strategies have been followed in order to improve the situation of discrepancy between goal and reality and thus serve appropriate validation and recognition practices. Burkart Sellin talks about three distinctly different stages: ⁽¹¹⁾

- (a) the harmonisation of vocational education and training (1957-1973),
- (b) the approximation of vocational training levels (1974-1992),
- (c) the convergence of vocational training (1992-).

An overview is given in the Cedefop Panorama 'Recognition and transparency of vocational qualifications; The way forward' ⁽¹²⁾. In many cases, these strategies have, to varying degrees, been centralised efforts attempting to define and implement, through legal or administrative means, some kind of standard, format or principle to be followed on a European level. These centralised efforts, firstly for regulated professions and secondly for non-regulated professions, are summarised below.

2.2. Recognition of diplomas

This area covers all 'regulated professions,' i.e. those in which it is a statutory requirement to hold a diploma or other occupational qualification in order to pursue the profession in question. The lack of the necessary national diploma constitutes a legal obstacle to access to the profession. Substantial progress was made on the basis of Article 57 of the Treaty of Rome, which enabled the Community to adopt directives 'for the mutual recognition of diplomas, certificates and other evidence of formal qualification' ⁽¹³⁾. The 'legal corpus' in the area can be summarised in the following way:

- (a) the directives adopted during the 1960s and 1970s, mostly relating to health professions, specified common standards such as length and content of the education and training of these professions;

⁽¹¹⁾ Cedefop - European Centre for the Development of Vocational Training; Sellin, Burkart. *Recognition and transparency of vocational qualifications in the European Union*. Luxembourg: EUR-OP, 1997.

⁽¹²⁾ Cedefop - European Centre for the Development of Vocational Training; Bjornavold, Jens; Sellin, Burkart. *Recognition and transparency of vocational qualifications; The way forward*. Luxembourg: EUR-OP, 1997.

⁽¹³⁾ Treaty of Rome, 1957, Article 57, paragraph 1.

- (b) the general directives concerning university and higher professional education (89/48/EEC and 95/51/EEC) introduced a principle of mutual trust; if a person is qualified in one Member State, he or she should normally be entitled to equal treatment in another Member State.

The exercise of all professions requiring regulated qualifications is henceforth possible for all citizens of the EU who have acquired an appropriate level of vocational training in another Member State.

2.3. Comparability and transparency of qualifications

For non-regulated professions, and in order to overcome the obstacles mentioned above, two main strategies have been adopted, characterised by the concepts comparability and transparency.

2.3.1. Comparability of qualifications

Two basic texts define and regulate efforts aimed at comparability of qualifications:

- (a) Council Decision of 1985 ⁽¹⁴⁾ regarding a system for the comparability of vocational qualifications, attempts to introduce a common comparability format (comparative tables), making transnational comparisons easier;
- (b) Council Resolution of 1990 ⁽¹⁵⁾ on the comparability of vocational training qualifications, stressed the need for work on the comparability of qualifications to be extended to more occupations, at all levels of vocational training, which are involved most frequently in current instances of mobility. It also noted the need for more rapid progress in the work of collecting, analysing and publishing information as well as on the dissemination, exchange and utilisation of information on the comparability of vocational qualifications, already established.

The work following the 1985 decision was deemed useful for improving mutual understanding of qualification systems. The need to integrate a Community dimension into national qualifications was also emphasised. However, the results proved difficult to use for a number of reasons. The procedure was considered far too complex because of the amount of preparatory work generated and the adoption of decision-making by unanimity. Moreover, the structure of training levels used and the common practical job descriptions were too artificial. They failed to reflect the reality of the employment market and gave an incomplete picture of occupations subject to an increasingly rapid rhythm of change. The arrangements were inappropriate to the need for ongoing updating in the area of vocational qualifications. They

⁽¹⁴⁾ Council Decision of 16 July 1985 on the comparability of vocational qualifications in the Member States of the European Community, (85/368/EEC), OJ L 199, 31.7.1985.

⁽¹⁵⁾ Council Resolution of 18 December 1990 on the comparability of vocational training qualifications, (91/C 109/01), OJ C109 24.4.1991, p. 0001-0002.

took account only of certified initial qualifications. Occupational experience and continuing training were ignored and yet are essential factors of qualification when considered in the perspective of lifelong learning. Consequently, the results, which were complex and difficult to use, catered only partly to the practical information needs of employers and workers, and ever since there has been a low level of consultation by the target public of the information produced.

In view of the difficulties encountered and the unsatisfactory cost-effectiveness of the system, the 'comparability of qualifications' activity was dropped and a new 'transparency' approach adopted.

2.3.2. Transparency of qualifications

The term transparency expresses the need to make qualifications more visible and comprehensive. Gradually replacing the comparability approach, the objective of transparency is presented in two basic texts:

- (a) Council Resolution of 1992 ⁽¹⁶⁾ concludes that there are doubts whether the work done provides the kind of information necessary to promote free movement of labour. The resolution thus indicates the need for new directions in the work towards transparency of qualifications. It focuses on the need for individuals to take into account a broad perspective on qualifications. It also introduces 'individual portfolios' as a possible source of information and exemplifies means such as common qualification formats. It encourages initiatives by the Member States on reciprocal information on qualifications and systems;
- (b) Council Resolution of 1996 ⁽¹⁷⁾ calls on Member States to promote increased transparency by introducing a common format for certificates where the following information should be presented: an indication of the body issuing the certificate and its status in law; indication of the identity of the holder of the certificate; indication of the purpose, duration and content of the training; and, a description of the qualifications obtained, indication of the final results of the courses followed and information on the validity of the certificates as regards access to certain occupations and/or further training courses. The resolution also expresses a wish to promote the measures necessary for issuing vocational training certificates in other Community languages.

Taking into account the different initiatives to improve support for individuals seeking employment, education or training abroad on the basis of vocational qualifications, it must be admitted that concrete results are limited. The 1992 council resolution can be seen as a new strategy to address the complexities in the field. The rights of individuals and different

⁽¹⁶⁾ Council Resolution of 3 December 1992 on transparency of qualifications, (93/ C 49/01), OJ C 49, 19.3.1993.

⁽¹⁷⁾ Council Resolution of 15 July 1996 on the transparency of vocational training certificates, (96/C 224/04), OJ C 224, 1.8.1996, p. 0007-0008.

measures to support and facilitate individuals and employers are put forward at the expense of standardisation and comparability systems.

Possible explanations for the general problem of limited acceptance of foreign qualifications as well as of the limited impact of earlier approaches, can be summarised as follows:

- (a) national qualifications (or standards) are viewed as superior to 'foreign qualifications' in terms of quality and/or national/cultural relevance;
- (b) national qualifications are linked to wage mechanisms, threatened if supranational standards are introduced and accepted;
- (c) national qualifications are linked to mechanisms regulating access to professional-economic activity, threatened if supranational standards are introduced and accepted;
- (d) national qualifications are related to mechanisms regulating immigration, threatened if supranational standards are introduced and accepted;
- (e) comparability formats tend to be very complex, time-consuming and difficult to update in accordance with a rapidly changing working life;
- (f) the exchange of information on vocational qualifications lacks systematic continuity;
- (g) interpretations between languages, administrative systems and cultures are difficult;
- (h) lack of mechanisms supporting the exchange of information and interpretation;
- (i) lack of links to parallel activities, e.g. educational and vocational guidance, counselling and placement, etc.

These points illustrate that the question of transparency of vocational qualifications cannot be reduced to a legal question. Acceptance of 'foreign qualifications' is very much linked to whether we trust our neighbours or not. In this context, systematic and easily accessible information is of crucial importance.

While the 1989 and 1992 directives concerning higher professional education ⁽¹⁸⁾ introduced a 'principle of mutual trust' along with practical mechanisms supporting smooth handling of applications, no parallel system has been introduced in the area of vocational qualifications. Generally, the issue of 'mutual trust' has not been very much debated within the field of vocational qualifications. By referring to the greater heterogeneity in this area (compared to higher education), few have so far been willing to confront this question in a systematic and committed way.

Although the Council Resolutions of 1992 and 1996 indicate a strategy to meet the need for information, follow up has been limited. The transfer of vocational qualifications between countries within the EU may thus, in spite of a high number of initiatives and good ideas, still represent an obstacle to free movement.

⁽¹⁸⁾ Council Directive of 21 December 1988 on a general system for the recognition of higher education diplomas awarded on completion of professional education and training of at least three years' duration, (89/48 EEC), OJ 24.1.89 and Council Directive of 18 June 1992 on a second general system for the recognition of professional education and training to supplement Directive 89/48/EEC, (92/51 EEC), OJ L 209/25, 24.7.1992.

2.4. Conclusion

The legal corpus dealing with the issues of comparability and transparency has been developed over a period of approximately forty years. Different principles have been applied and different levels of education and training have been addressed. Although valid in legal terms, the political and practical importance of the initiatives presented vary somewhat.

The directives covering health education are still important and accepted prerequisites for mobility within this segment of the labour market. It is worth noting, however, that the professions in question are, relatively speaking, homogenous, and that the legal regulations are based on a *de facto* harmonisation supported both through national authorities and professional bodies.

The general directives on university education and higher professional education have also become accepted legal prerequisites for the mobility of people with post upper-secondary qualifications. Evaluation shows that the number of cases handled through the general systems is relatively limited (and varies between countries). It must be added, though, that these are the problematic cases. There is reason to believe that the principle of mutual trust introduced in the directives is, generally speaking, accepted. But, as in the case of medical professions, this may be linked to the relative homogeneity of university education, and the elements of shared traditions existing within this part of the educational system irrespective of country.

The Council Decision of 1985 and the Council Resolution of 1990, focusing on comparability of vocational training qualifications are, legally speaking, still valid. The practical and political support for trying to introduce an official and common format for the comparison of vocational qualifications has been abandoned. This is partly a result of the practical problems faced by such an approach but perhaps even more because of its political implications; the introduction of such a common format could lead to a certain (indirect) harmonisation and standardisation, conflicting the principle of national governance of education and training. The practical and political problems faced by the comparability 'exercises' illustrate the relative heterogeneity of vocational qualifications compared with higher education. The scope and variety of training models and qualification profiles is much higher in this segment of education and training. This, of course, is not necessarily something negative. Variance may be an expression of tailored solutions meeting specific demands on a national and regional level. This also shows that transparency is important, but not the same as standardisation or even harmonisation. A standard based on the needs of industry and the labour market may be important and legitimate, but a standard based only on a need to simplify *per se* may not necessarily be so.

Council Resolutions 1992 and 1996 can be looked upon as a critique of the comparability approach. Both emphasise the principle of national governance and support voluntary initiatives like the development of standard formats for the issuing of certificates and the translation of certificates into several languages. These resolutions are still valid and closely linked to current political consensus in the area. The practical suggestions made in 1992 and 1996 have, however, not received the same attention in all Member States.

3. The Leonardo da Vinci programme

3.1. Introduction

Following the termination of efforts to evolve a 'comparability system' (see above), Leonardo da Vinci can be seen as the most recent, and by far most influential initiative in respect of increased transparency of vocational qualifications. While covering a wide range of topics, the council decision introducing the Leonardo da Vinci programme ⁽¹⁹⁾, underlines the importance of the issue of transparency of vocational qualifications.

Compared to prior initiatives, the principles applied in the Leonardo approach are different. Instead of introducing a centralised political and/or legal regulation/recommendation, thousands of partnerships all over Europe were invited to experiment and, if possible, introduce new methods and approaches along paths defined (in part) by themselves. The potential of this approach, in terms of uncovering a wide range of possible solutions, is apparent. It is more uncertain how efficient this approach is in terms of securing permanent solutions and practical support for those individuals wanting to transfer qualifications from one country to another.

3.2. Objectives of the Leonardo da Vinci programme

The Leonardo da Vinci programme is organised according to 19 objectives (Article 3 of Council Decision of December 6, 1994), indicating the direction and emphasis of the programme. The first three objectives indicate the general direction of the programme. These are:

- (a) to improve the quality and innovative capacity of Member States' vocational training systems and arrangements;
- (b) to develop the European dimension in vocational training and vocational guidance;
- (c) to promote lifelong training so as to encourage ongoing adaptation of skills to meet the needs of workers and contribute to reducing unemployment and facilitate personal development.

Two of the 19 objectives (m) and (o), focus explicitly on the question of transparency. According to these, the programme is supposed to promote:

'...cooperation on skill requirements and training needs and ... encouraging the acquisition and transparency of qualifications and an understanding of the key skills relevant for

⁽¹⁹⁾ Council Decision of 6 December 1994 establishing an action programme for the implementation of a European Community vocational training policy, (94/819/EC), OJ L 340, 29.12.1994.

technological development and the functioning of the internal market, including the free movement of goods, services, persons and capital, the competitiveness of undertakings and the requirements of the labour market.' (Article 3, objective (m)).

The paragraph illustrates that the question of transparency is linked to the broader context of free movement (of goods, services, persons and capital), within an internal market, emphasising the economic importance attributed to this question. This is followed up in the next paragraph (o), where it is stated that the programme shall promote:

'...the gradual development of an open European vocational training and vocational qualifications area; particularly through the exchange of information and experience on obstacles to application of the free provision of services by training bodies.' (Article 3, objective (o)).

This paragraph is instructive. Firstly, by clearly stating the objective of developing an open European area of qualifications, free movement of qualifications is presented as a prerequisite for free movement of labour. Secondly, this open European area of qualifications is to be developed through the exchange of information and experience. The voluntary basis of the approach is thus emphasised, reflecting the basic principle of *subsidiarity* within the European Union, with respect to:

'...the responsibility of the Member States for the content and organisation of vocational training and excluding any harmonisation of the laws and regulations of the Member States.' (Article 1, Council Decision of December 6, 1994).

The programme is thus supposed to support and supplement the actions of the Member States. It is not supposed to work towards arrangements overruling the laws, regulations or standards of the Member States. A criticism directed towards prior EU initiatives in the area of transparency (notably the system of 'comparability of vocational qualifications,' (85/368/EEC)), has been that they tend to impose standards in a way that conflicts with existing national and sectoral standards and objectives. Transparency of qualifications, leading towards a convergence of recognition practices across Europe, should, therefore, be based on a voluntary approach, outside the realm of formal political and legal jurisdiction.

Thus, promoting transparency within such a framework is more a question of broad involvement than enforcing a formal framework. The critical question facing this paradoxical blend of grand objectives and volunteerism, is whether it is possible to reach that far by such means. A reasonable hypothesis would be that a voluntary approach must meet certain minimum requirements linked to volume (number and scope), and profile (sectoral, professional) of initiatives, in order to succeed. A small number of isolated initiatives will make no difference to those individuals trying to transfer qualifications from one (national, sectoral) context to another. An open European area of qualifications must, if it is to be based on the voluntary exchange of information and experience, be further based on a massive input

of resources, ideas, experiments and committed participants. If this is the case, individuals may be served in a better way than they are today.

3.3. Structure of the programme

The structure of a programme like Leonardo da Vinci may be looked upon as of secondary importance. The internal structure may, however, tell us something about the clarity and transparency of objectives and working methodologies. An unclear and non-transparent structure may prevent potential users from gaining insight into the work of the programme.

The operational aims of the programme are listed in the annex to the council decision on 'Community measures'. This annex also defines the structural and organisational framework, establishing guidelines for the contractors as well as the users of the programme. Whether this structure contributes to the clarity of the programme is up for discussion. Four main strands ⁽²⁰⁾ containing more than twenty measures are defined. These measures are then divided into an even higher number of areas to be covered. All these categories and levels are, in principle, if not always explicitly, linked to the 19 objectives in the council decision. And if this were not enough, the main areas of initial vocational education and training, continuing vocational training and lifelong learning are supposed to be covered in a systematic way through the three project forms defined - transnational pilot projects, transnational placement projects and surveys/analyses.

This multitude of categories and levels hardly contributes to the internal transparencies of the programme ⁽²¹⁾. Not so much because of the number of categories and levels introduced, but partly because of the lack of parallelism between the objectives introduced in the Council decision and the operational follow-up of these in the annexed Commission measures. In most cases this can be seen as a practical problem easily overcome through careful reading of the two documents; in other cases, the complexity may reduce clarity, and thus the potential of the programme.

It is important to note that the topic of transparency is covered in all the strands except number four (support measures). It is also worth noting that the development of European curricula and training modules are very prominent in these strands, emphasising an indirect approach towards transparency of vocational qualifications. However, the correspondence between the Council decision and the Community measures in the area of transparency is not obvious. It is unclear how the important goal of creating an open European area of vocational qualifications is to be realised. It might be argued that such an open area would be realised as

⁽²⁰⁾ The four strands are: 'support for the improvement of VET systems and arrangements in MS,' 'support for the improvement of VET measures including universal/independent cooperation, concerning undertakings and workers,' 'support for the development of language skills, knowledge and the dissemination of innovation in the field of vocational training,' and 'support measures.'

⁽²¹⁾ The second Leonardo da Vinci programme seems to be based on a similar understanding, presenting a much more simplified approach.

a type of collective outcome of programme activity. If this is so, the question of overall coordination is left uncovered.

The lack of structural clarity is strengthened through presentations in the annual compendiums (so far the main source of information for potential users outside the programme). In the presentation of the 1995 projects a thematic structure is introduced, listing 18 themes central to the programme. These themes are not parallel to the 19 objectives emphasised in the council decision and it is not clear (at least from the compendium presenting them), which selection criteria they refer to. The fact that the theme 'transparency' is not included (emphasised in the Article 3 objectives and in the annex to the council decision), points to a somewhat arbitrary approach to the structuring of the programme.

This impression is strengthened by the fact that the Commission (in 1996) introduced yet another structuring approach, known as 'clusters.' While not mentioned in the Council decision or its annex, clusters of projects were defined to bring together related projects so as to create synergy, and support cooperation across project boundaries. The transparency-related projects were mostly gathered in cluster 7, and titled 'qualifications' (²²).

Generally speaking, the structuring of the Leonardo da Vinci programme exemplified in the area of transparency of vocational qualifications is complex. Firstly, it is difficult to discern which projects are aimed towards the same goals, thus making programme-internal cooperation more laborious and troublesome. Secondly, it is difficult for outsiders to gain an overview of what is going on within the programme. A more transparent structure of objectives being followed up through parallel measures could have contributed to a better internal overview and cooperation as well as making it easier for external users to identify useful projects and their results.

(²²) A one-day conference was arranged in Brussels in the autumn of 1996 to achieve this synergy effect. The participants stressed the importance of such initiatives. Some of them indicated, however, that the time provided (one day), and the form (an overload of plenary sessions), made it difficult to reach such synergy. A positive effect of this conference was that some of the projects represented met at a later stage, on their own initiative. A certain cooperation between projects was thus achieved.

4. Profile of the transparency-relevant projects of 1995

4.1. Introduction

We begin our analysis of the Leonardo da Vinci approach to transparency with a study of the 1995 projects of the programme. This is the first group of projects actually concluded which provides us with an opportunity to discuss their results and their impact. The 1996 and 1997 projects will be dealt with separately in the two following chapters.

A total of 749 projects were selected on the basis of the 1995 call for proposals. These 749 were selected from more than 4,500 project proposals received from the fifteen European Union Member States, as well as from Iceland, Norway, and Liechtenstein (EFTA). A total of 581 were defined as pilot projects, with 121 as placement and exchange programmes, and 47 as surveys and analysis projects. With the exception of the small number of surveys and analysis projects (which at the outset focus on 'pure' knowledge acquisition and research), the majority of projects were highly practice-oriented. It is possible to describe them as a form of applied research.

In one respect, the entire Leonardo programme is working towards increased transparency of vocational qualifications. By the end of 1999, when the programme is completed, thousands of European partnerships will have been active, working on topics linked to vocational education and training. Irrespective of the objects, and even the results of each single project, this necessarily promotes the exchange of information and sharing of experiences. But only a minority of projects focus directly on the question of transparency of vocational qualifications. On the basis of an examination of the objectives of each project in the 1995 portfolio, a group of 79 projects has been singled out ⁽²³⁾.

These 79 projects have been working according to the transparency-related objectives in Article 3 of the council decision and the measures listed in the annex to the decision. Based on our reading and interpretation of the objectives, this selection can of course be challenged. Single projects may have been left out, as the inclusion of others may seem doubtful. The main point is, however, that approximately one-tenth of the 1995 projects have chosen transparency of vocational qualifications as their primary focus.

The group of 79 projects can be divided into two main groups. The first group consists of those projects working on a general level, working on approaches across sectors, branches and nations. Many of these aim at the development and introduction of methodologies,

⁽²³⁾ In spite of the importance attributed to the transparency issue in the council decision and its annex, the only way to identify projects actually dealing with this matter is to study them one by one.

instruments or mechanisms supporting transparency of qualifications on an 'all-embracing' European level. We have identified 16 projects belonging to this group. The second group consists of those projects limiting their work to one sector, occupation or qualification category. This is by far the largest group, where a total of 63 projects have been identified. The projects within this group follow an indirect path towards transparency of qualifications, supporting, for example, analyses of skills and training needs in sectors, development of European curricula, and actual testing of training modules.

4.2. Projects with a general focus on transparency

The 16 projects in the first group of general projects cover a broad range of issues linked to the area of transparency. Covering both formal vocational qualifications and non-formal vocational competences (linked to work experience) these projects represent an interesting mixture of innovative and more traditional approaches to the challenge of transparency.

A first approach, represented by three projects (D-1089 'Valid', I-3561 'Transparency of certification', and UK-3574 'Information models to provide transparency of vocational qualifications and certification'), proposes to develop 'transfer guides,' 'assessment grids' or 'information models' in order to make it easier to compare qualifications from different countries. At first glance, this might be seen as an idea parallel to the system for the 'comparability of vocational qualifications' introduced in 1985 ⁽²⁴⁾. This is, however, only partly the case. The German project gave up on the idea of producing a 'transfer guide,' judging it to be difficult and impractical. Or, as it is said in the final report:

'...a "best practice" of recognition and validation of qualifications is not possible on a one-to-one basis. A practical transfer 'sender countries' to 'receiver countries' presupposes the existence of similar problems, similar definitions of problems and possibilities of action. In the area of validation and recognition of qualifications, however, these similarities are less frequent than in other areas of vocational training. The original idea of creating a 'transfer manual' was therefore given up.'

In spite of this, the project can be looked upon as one of the most interesting transparency projects in the Leonardo programme so far, mainly because of its explicit focus on, and link to, the social partners. Throughout the project period, material from this project was disseminated to the most important social partner organisations on a European level, contributing to the discussion in this area. The Valid project will be used as a case in the coming report, illustrating the importance of the link between project partnerships and potential users, in this case the social partners.

A second approach, represented by two projects (NL-3441 'Netref' and F-3742 'Natnet'), works towards the establishment of 'national reference structures,' meant to improve the

⁽²⁴⁾ 85/368/EEC, see note 7.

distribution and exchange of information on vocational qualifications in Europe. Underlining the impossible task of providing information on European vocational qualifications from one centralised institution, these projects have tried to elaborate and establish national reference centres linked to each other in a European network. The idea is to clarify where information on vocational qualifications is to be found, thus improving the flow of information and the quality of interpretation.

An individual seeking support, an enterprise or a Ministry gathering information, should immediately know where to go in their own country. This national centre will then use the network of European centres in order to find the relevant advice or information. The Netref project has been very active in disseminating the idea of a decentralised approach to transparency. So far, this has resulted in a continuation of the project through a Leonardo 'multiplier' project, adding four new partner countries to the original six. The Natnet project, due to its character as a study/analysis project, has acted as a supporter to Netref. According to the decentralised approach chosen by Netref (in cooperation with Natnet), no single centre model has been imposed on the participating Member States. This choice has to be made in view of national context and preconditions.

On a general level, the 'reference-structure' approach is promising, and may, given permanent support, contribute to the exchange and interpretation of information in this area. This presupposes an efficient implementation of the idea into the permanent structures of the Member States. So far, the integration of the reference centres, as well as visibility of these initiatives, varies somewhat between the participating partners.

A third approach, represented by two projects (F-157, 'European network of databases on vocational training', and UK-3590, 'Development and implementation of a European network of vocational qualifications databases'), is also linked to the improvement of the exchange of information on vocational qualifications in Europe. The basic idea is the same as in the Netref and Natnet projects; the flow of information must be improved and it must be clarified where information can be found.

The practical approach is, however, different from that of Netref, producing CD-Roms or linking up to the Internet. An efficient use of such database efforts requires a strong link to user organisations. If this link is insufficiently secured, technically sound solutions run the risk of not being used. So far the success of these initiatives has been limited. Generally speaking, databases are established on the basis of specific and very heterogeneous objectives. The 'networking' of such bases thus runs into the difficulty of compatibility. The UK project was, according to our information, discontinued during the period due to lack of follow up.

A fourth approach is represented by the 'Eurocert' project (IRL-3485), which tries to develop and implement a certificate supplement. Building on experiences from other European projects (Petra) this project has worked on the objective of simplifying the way information on vocational qualifications is exchanged between countries. The aim is to be able to issue a

common certificate supplement ('short and simple') in any Community language, with all vocational certificates. Although proposing a very practical and visible contribution, the 'Eurocert' illustrates some general problems facing the Leonardo projects in the area of transparency of qualifications. Not all project partners are well connected to national decision-making structures or potential user institutions. The ability to disseminate results and link these to permanent institutions varies considerably. 'Eurocert' illustrates the general problem of coordination in the area of transparency. Other European initiatives in respect of certificate supplements have received little attention from the project (the experience of the German Ministry for Education in this area is notably absent in the documents of this project). Like Netref, 'Eurocert' has received continued support, 'multiplier project', making it possible to integrate partners from additional Member States in the project.

A fifth approach is represented by five projects focusing on methodologies for assessment of skills (F-11, 'European framework for linguistic measurement and certification,' F-3914, 'European preparation for the validation of learning by experience,' L-3905 'Concept and approach to evaluating competition, study and research,' UK-1188, 'Computer assisted assessment in the workplace,' UK-3617, 'Common European management standards and self-assessment tools', and UK-3890, 'Promoting added value through evaluation'). The attention given to competences acquired through learning outside formal education and training institutions (non-formal learning) is common to all these projects. Non-formal learning is very often less visible than the learning taking place in education and training institutions. Most projects mentioned above try to develop methodologies in order to increase this visibility.

The task of achieving transparency of vocational qualifications is clearly complicated by the effort of balancing formal and non-formal learning. If non-formal competences are to be transferred from one context to another (enterprises, sectors or countries), this requires 'measuring' methodologies able to provide a reliable and valid picture of the learning in question ⁽²⁵⁾.

In this report we will emphasise that most projects seem to underestimate the question of legitimacy. Assessments can be compared with bank notes; they have to be trusted. The value of assessments at home and abroad depends very much on the institutions participating in these exercises, the inclusion of social partners as well as public authorities being of specific importance. The development and definition of qualification standards is part of this picture; standards in some form or another are necessary prerequisites to any assessment of non-formal learning. Covering the questions of legitimacy and participation as side issues, the focus on these basic prerequisites for successful assessment approaches is not very well developed in these projects. They illustrate, however, that the awareness of these issues is strong and growing. The dominance of France and the UK in this area is probably no coincidence, reflecting the centrality of these issues in the respective national education

⁽²⁵⁾ This topic is treated in more detail in the Cedefop reference publication 'Making learning visible' (Cedefop, Bjornavold, 2000). This report presents, among other things, an overview of Leonardo da Vinci projects, their profile, results and implementation.

debates. The focus on assessment is inevitably linked to the question of 'benchmarks' or standards. As will be illustrated throughout this report, the subjects of qualification standards and transparency of vocational qualifications are closely linked.

A sixth approach is represented by one project focusing on the question of quality standards in education and training (UK-3581). Focusing on enterprise internal training activity, the project has tried to develop a standardised 'tool kit' enabling enterprises to assess their 'health' and 'progress' in the area of training and competence development. The idea is to develop a voluntary standard, compatible with more general quality standards (ISO, etc.). To some degree, this approach is related to the assessment projects referred to above. The main difference seems to be a focus on the enterprise level rather than the individual level. This project is linked to the transparency field through its explicit focus on standards, or, as it is stated in the objectives:

'(the group wishes) to find transferable criteria, measuring conventions and measuring instruments, which at all stages of the training process, mesh systematically and are both objective and predictable.'

By emphasising the importance of 'measuring,' this quality approach is related to the methodological projects listed above. But important differences exist: the European quality standard project is very explicit in underlining the need for commitment and participation if such a standard is going to succeed. The 'tool kit' is not viewed as a tool in a narrow, instrumental sense, rather as a procedure combining certain methodological steps with the appropriate organisational processes.

This project represents an interesting illustration of the challenges of dissemination and impact. Consisting of partners from five countries, national impact is very different. In two countries, actual cooperation with enterprises has taken place; in one country a certain cooperation with providers of training has taken place; and in the last two, no actual testing has been done. Interesting and illuminating 'test cases' remain and can be used in future promotion of the principles involved. Project partners admit to the fact that dissemination of project results has not been at the forefront of their work. This is understandable in view of the challenge of actually developing such standards and measuring instruments. On a general level, though, this illustrates the basic weakness of this approach, good results may disappear when the temporary project framework disappears.

Though not including all the 16 projects, the presentation illustrates the wide range of solutions and approaches presented by these 16 projects. To summarise, the following approaches have been chosen:

- (a) the comparability approach ,
- (b) the database approach,
- (c) the reference centre approach,
- (d) the certificate supplement approach,
- (e) the assessment approach,
- (f) the quality standard approach.

Covering a wide range of projects and partnerships, these approaches illustrate the scope of the Leonardo da Vinci programme in the area of transparency and recognition of vocational qualifications. To some degree, these approaches illustrate the tension between a 'top-down' strategy trying to introduce common European models, grids and tables, and a 'bottom-up' strategy emphasising the importance of voluntary approaches based on dissemination of 'best practices,' if possible within a decentralised framework.

Netref underlines the importance of allowing national solutions to develop without interference. European added value should be achieved through a voluntary but systematic 'networking' of these national structures. Though not tested at full scale, Netref illustrates the strengths of such an approach. However, it also illustrates the weaknesses. If the reference centre model is going to have some wider impact (i.e. support individuals moving from one country to another), some form of additional support (economic and financial) has to be provided. Netref can be viewed as an initiative in need of transfer from a typical project horizon (short termed and narrow), to a more permanent and stable institutional context.

The 'Eurocert' initiative, can, at least to some degree, be looked upon as a potentially successful 'top down' approach. The project proposes a common European format, the value of which depends on its ability to 'override' and 'dominate' in this area. So far, this dominance has not been achieved. Whether this will happen remains to be seen. Again we see the need to move from the project context to a more predictable institutional context, providing more permanent support. Even though 'Eurocert' has printed and disseminated nice brochures, this is not enough to convince national educational authorities in Europe that this approach is the best, especially in countries which have developed parallel initiatives. On the basis of the experiences from these 16 projects, preliminary conclusions are:

- (i) the programme has been successful in bringing forward committed partnerships, ideas and suggestions for practical solutions;
- (ii) a more efficient dissemination of results and an improved link to potential users of project results represents a major challenge to the programme. In most cases, projects have spent relatively limited time and energy on the dissemination of results. The impact of the projects, in terms of developing better solutions and systems, is thus uncertain. This problem is increased through the temporary character of the work; ideas run the risk of disappearing with the disappearance of the project framework.

4.3. Projects with a sector focus on transparency

As referred to in the first part of this note, the Council decision rules out any harmonisation of laws and regulations of the Member States. National responsibility in the area of education and training is uncontested - national systems overrule European systems. Harmonisation and convergence can only be supported when common national/European interests are identified. Looking at those projects working at sectoral level, the emphasis on the superiority of national principles and practices is very much absent. In fact, the entire group of 63 projects stresses the need to develop transnational approaches to education and training, moving gradually towards European standards in their respective sectoral areas. Based on a shared understanding of an international and global economy, the need to support harmonisation and convergence is hardly questioned.

4.3.1. A common working model

Compared to the group of projects working on a general level, the homogeneity of the sectoral projects is striking. While we have been able to identify at least six different approaches to transparency in the group of 16 general projects discussed above, we can identify one basic model applied by the projects in the second, sectoral group. Some minor differences exist, but the objectives, along with working methods, are almost identical from project to project. Whether the same homogeneity can be identified when it comes to results, dissemination and impact, is of course another question which will be discussed in greater detail at a later stage. The 'ideal typical' sectoral projects can be described in the following way:

- (a) the general objective is to support sectoral convergence in the area of training, initial and/or continuing training, in the sector. A majority of projects envisage a 'European' training approach as their final objective;
- (b) the first step is to initiate an investigation/survey into the skills needs and current skills supply (quantity) in the sector;
- (c) the second step is to initiate an analysis of existing training practices in the sector, both in terms of substance and curricula and in terms of pedagogical approaches and training tools;
- (d) the third step consists of an outlining of relevant qualification criteria for the sector, often the development of specific European curricula;
- (e) the fourth step consists of the development of assessment and validation methodologies. These methodologies are necessary in order to identify skills needs at individual and enterprise levels;
- (f) the fifth step consists of the development of training modules on the basis of the steps described above, including manuals for trainers and for self-training;
- (g) the sixth step consists of the development of 'training tools,' normally in the form of CD-Roms, videos and internet web pages;
- (h) the seventh and last step consists of the testing of these modules and tools in the partner countries.

Not all projects cover all elements. Some variations exist as to the emphasis on different points but this does not affect the basic model outlined above. The sectoral projects combine a genuine 'bottom-up' approach with the clear objective of European harmonisation and standardisation of vocational qualifications. This voluntary approach towards harmonisation and convergence is interesting, especially in a situation where harmonisation by political/legal means is ruled out.

If such a strategy is to succeed, it depends on several factors. Firstly, the questions of dissemination and impact are as important for this group of projects as they are for the general projects. Secondly, the scope of sectors covered by projects is important. Transparency of qualifications cannot be achieved through convergence and harmonisation in one sector alone; all parts of the economy have to be covered. The volume and distribution of projects in this area throughout the period 1996 through 1999 will thus be decisive. This will be discussed in the final chapter of the report.

4.3.2. The scope of sectoral projects

If we apply a simple division between primary, secondary and tertiary sectors in our analysis, the majority (41) of the 63 projects, belong to the secondary sector. Only two can be located within the primary sector while 20 can be linked to the tertiary sector, private or public services. The table below illustrates the distribution of projects:

Sectoral projects 1995

	Primary sector	Secondary sector	Tertiary sector	No of projects
Trans-occupational competence		Adhesive technologies, Thermal Spraying, Laser technology, Hydraulic technology, Welding (2), Environmental engineering (2)	Cleaning, Distribution, Maintenance, Waste Water Handling, Landscaping	14
Specific fields, sectoral or occupational	Agriculture	Food (3), Wood Glass (2) and Clothing industries (4). Construction and Ceramic tile industry. Auto-repair, Auto-electronics and Auto Body repair (2). Metal, Chemistry and Micro Electronic industries. Electromagnetic, Aluminium and Medical-Bio-technical (3) industries.	Hair dressing, Tourism (4), Auto Retail, Road transport, Hotel (2), Air Traffic Control, Banking, Theatre, Harbour logistics, Telecommunications, Health (3), Social care	49
Number of projects	2	41	20	63

As previously mentioned, it is not possible to judge the Leonardo sectoral profile on the basis of the 1995 projects alone. A complete overview that included the entire programme would be useful for a wide range of potential users from individuals, enterprises, sector organisations and public bodies. By itself, an overview is not sufficient however. Only when combined with a systematic monitoring of results, of dissemination and of impact will it be possible to judge the relative success of the projects. This could finally be used as a basis for decisions on additional measures and initiatives.

5. Profile of the transparency-relevant projects of 1996

5.1. Introduction

According to the Leonardo da Vinci compendium of 1996 the call for proposals was more targeted than in 1995. The Community priorities identified in the 1996 call for proposal reflect the white paper of the European Commission presented in November 1995 ⁽²⁶⁾. These five priorities are:

- (a) the acquisition of new skills in order to improve employment prospects, particularly by adapting training to the changes in work organisation, technological developments or social change, the improvement of linguistic skills, by the acquisition and validation of core competences;
- (b) forging closer links between educational and training establishments and enterprises, particularly through the development of all forms of on-and-off-the-job training courses (apprenticeship/traineeships, etc.) at all levels, technology transfer, and the promotion of new forms of tutoring and mentoring arrangements;
- (c) combating exclusion, particularly by promoting access to training for those at a disadvantage in the labour market, by improving their employment prospects, individual skill plans and career opportunities;
- (d) promoting investment in human resources, particularly by the improvement of human resource planning, guidance and counselling skills, as well as the development of individual career plans and developing new methodologies which remove disincentives to training for small and medium sized enterprises (SMEs);
- (e) promoting access to skills through the information society in the context of lifelong learning, particularly by the encouragement of production and use of open and distance learning material and multimedia software, through the innovative use of training materials and multimedia software, through the innovative use of training materials and the training of trainers in these fields.

The issue of transparency is not explicitly mentioned in the five priorities. The priorities can be looked upon as statements on a general level and the issue of transparency is only touched upon (implicitly) in the first point. The Council Decision of December 6, 1994, introducing the Leonardo da Vinci programme constitutes a general background.

In the second call for proposals of the Leonardo da Vinci programme these general objectives were taken further ⁽²⁷⁾. The issue of transparency is mentioned under Priority 1 ⁽²⁸⁾, 'The acquisition of new skills'. As it is said:

⁽²⁶⁾ European Commission, 1995, Teaching and learning: towards a learning society, white paper, Luxembourg.

⁽²⁷⁾ Official Journal of the European Communities No C 60/61, 29.2.96.

'18. Proposals should seek to improve employment prospects by adapting methods and content of vocational training to changes in work organisation, technological developments and social change, as well as to the needs of the single market, and/or contribute to improving language skills, by:

...

a) promoting the acquisition and transparency of vocational qualifications including core/key skills; developing assessment methodologies to validate core/key skills, prior learning, work experience, and informal training; and by examining ways of bringing informal and formal learning arrangements closer together in the context of promoting lifelong learning and access to it;

b) developing, testing or analysing new methods of validations/certification of skills and qualifications in particular for training highly qualified people in the tertiary sector, especially engineers and technicians working in production, installation and maintenance in the service sectors, with a view to contributing to greater transparency of skills among Member States.'

It is stressed ⁽²⁹⁾ that particular attention will be given to proposals which are 'capable of being part of a European network aimed at developing methods for validating competences, complementary to formal qualification systems, and opening new opportunities for individuals to have their skills validated and to promote their mobility'. Attention will also be given to proposals which 'show ability...in defining relevant training modules and the development of tools to accredit the learning of individuals (for example, through a "personal skills card").'

The second call for proposals reflects the first general objective of the white paper ⁽³⁰⁾. It emphasises development of methods and tools for assessment and accreditation of the learning of individuals. The assessment focus is combined with an emphasis on the relevance of learning outside the formal systems. By introducing suitable 'measuring instruments,' assessments of individuals will be made possible. By recognising a broader skills base, the status of learning and experience from work, voluntary activities and home will be heightened, thus making it easier to 'exploit' this huge reservoir of knowledge and experience.

The implication of this emphasis is that the issue of transparency is taken one step further. While the discussion so far has concentrated on transparency of formal qualifications, the

⁽²⁸⁾ A total of five priorities are presented with the second being 'Forging closer links between educational or training establishments and enterprises', the third being 'Combating exclusion', the fourth being 'Promoting investment in human resources', and the fifth being 'Promoting access to skills through the information society in the context of lifelong learning'.

⁽²⁹⁾ Point 19, Official Journal, *op.cit.*

⁽³⁰⁾ The reading of the white paper is made difficult through a very complicated structure, not always immediately accessible to the reader. As in the Leonardo da Vinci programme, the difference between aims, objectives and priorities is not always clear to the reader. The priority referred to above is thus something different from the first objective referred to earlier.

emphasis of the white paper and the 1996 Leonardo da Vinci programme clearly indicates that competences in general, formal or non-formal, are being acquired.

The second call for proposals launched by the Leonardo da Vinci programme attracted 3 118 proposals from all 15 Member States and Iceland, Norway and Liechtenstein. A total of 793 projects were selected of which 582 were pilot project, 170 placement and exchange programmes and 41 survey and analyses. A total amount of ECU 112 140 536 was spent (not including the exchange and placement programme).

Of the 793 projects in 1996, 75 of the pilot projects and survey and analyses projects were identified as dealing primarily with the transparency issue. All projects in the compendium were studied (except those in the exchange and placement programme) on the basis of an examination of their aims and objectives. Approximately 10 % of the projects have transparency in focus. This is the same proportion as was the case for the 1995 projects.

As in 1995, the 75 projects have been divided into two groups. The first group consists of projects working on a general, transsectoral and transnational level. The second group consists of projects where the focus is limited to one sector or one specific occupation or qualification. Seventeen projects have been identified as belonging to the first group and the remaining 58 to the second. The two groups are described in more detail below.

5.2. Projects with a general focus on transparency

When comparison is made with the 1995 projects, many similarities are found. The number of projects identified with a general transectoral or transnational focus is almost the same (17 compared to 16). The approaches identified in 1995 (comparability, database, reference centre, certificate supplement, assessment, and quality standard) can also be found in the 1996 project stock, even if there is not a 100 % overlap.

Three of the general approaches to transparency in the 1995 projects resurface clearly in the 1996 compendium; the certificate supplement approach, the assessment approach and the quality standard approach.

The 1995 efforts to develop 'certification supplements' and 'assessment methodologies' appear frequently in the 1996 programme, but, in most cases, at different stages of the same project. A number of initiatives investigate the possibility of establishing common European diplomas supported by methodologies and instruments facilitating the necessary assessment and recognition of qualifications and competences. The potential of new technologies, notably CD-Rom and Internet, is frequently referred to. The project 'European computer driving licence' is perhaps the best, and most successful example of this approach. Based on experiments already performed in the Nordic countries, the project has developed a modular test of skills in the field of computer systems and applications. On the basis of the skills

assessment a 'computer driving licence' is issued. This 'licence' has been implemented in a number of countries as well as in several major enterprises. This project illustrates in many ways the potential of a 'bottom up' strategy, implementing a standard independent of national authorities. It should be noted that the partners in this project are national computer societies, closely linked to their respective professional societies.

Project I 5253, 'Job card - European passport for professional competences', intends to develop a common EU format for a European 'skills' passport. The card will include personal data, curriculum vitae of studies and work experience and information on competence levels and formal qualifications.

Consequently, and in line with the general approach, there are also projects covering the development of validation and certification systems for transversal skills or key skills. The focus is on the individual and the idea is to develop evaluation tools for skills acquired through professional experience.

Project IRL 4666, 'Computer-aided learning in adult basic training', will develop a framework for the certification of learning outcomes in literacy, numeracy, social skills and learning to learn. The framework will be cross-moderated by certification institutes of the partners and is intended to lead to training descriptors and a schedule for the assessment of learning. The qualifications will, according to the project, form part of a standard European certificate designed to improve the mobility of workers through a system of transnational certification. The wide availability of materials on the Internet will open up training and employment opportunities.

The 'quality standard approach' represented by nine of the 1996 projects, works on an institutional level. Five projects share an ambition in trying to improve the quality of training by developing systems for validating/assessing training institutions. Their efforts involve evaluation systems for testing vocational training, reports on the effectiveness of training and formats enabling the certification of vocational training centres.

Project I 5215, 'Viability of vocational training certificates in the labour market', is an example of this approach. The project provides common grounds for discussing transparency by identifying national indicators of certificate transparency and quality information. A minimum transparency certification standard will be developed for discussion from a number of tested models. Another example is B 3642, 'Training efficiency measurement II.' This aims to develop and implement a permanent evaluation system for the testing of vocational training. The first step consists of making an inventory of existing instruments. In a second step, new instruments for the evaluation of internal, external and overall effectiveness of training will be developed. The new instrument and new software for processing data will be used for reporting on the effectiveness of the training (using project partners as cases for experimentation). A final report presenting general guidelines will be produced and presented to the public.

The 'quality standard approach' also comprises projects with shared aims of contributing to making qualifications within Europe more comparable by establishing specific quality control instruments.

P 4665, 'Development and training of vocational evaluation and assessment models, and tools', is an example where the aim is to develop new expertise in Member States' training systems, notably on evaluation and accreditation of vocational competences. One goal is the contribution to the definition of a European Union continuing vocational training policy. The development of new forms of evaluating and accrediting vocational competences for workers are more concrete objectives.

To summarise, the general approaches to transparency identified in the 1995 batch of projects have been followed up by the 1996 projects. The focus has narrowed, however, and projects tend to combine work on strategies of assessment with certification and recognition procedures, making it logical to combine these two approaches into one.

Two main approaches remain:

- (a) the assessment/certification approach - 8 projects,
- (b) the quality standard approach - 9 projects.

The first eight projects comprise work on establishing common European certification formats/frameworks, normally combined with the development of assessment methodologies. Several of these projects can be looked upon as efforts to develop automated (IT or internet-based) methodologies for assessment. A separate subgroup of projects (from 1995, 1996 and 1997) has been set up by the Commission to achieve synergy. This subgroup is further supplemented by projects from the Socrates programme, totalling 21 projects working on an automated approach to the challenge of a 'European skills card' ⁽³¹⁾.

The second approach focuses on training institutions and contains projects aimed at creating instruments for comparison of the quality of their training. Such measures are expected to positively influence competences among vocational training instructors and tutors.

⁽³¹⁾ DG Education and Culture of the Commission has developed a web page presenting these projects: '<http://europa.eu.int/comm/education/>'. See also the report 'Making learning visible,' (Cedefop, Bjornavold, op. cit.)

5.3. Projects with a sector focus on transparency

The 58 projects working within a limited sector or occupation-based perspective, emphasise the need to add a European or international dimension at this level. A majority of these projects aims at the development of European qualification standards or at the introduction of common curricula. Almost all of them plan to produce one or more modules for the training of certain competences. There is also a striking unity of effort towards the development and introduction of systems for assessment, validation and certification on a European level.

The number of projects identified in 1995 and 1996 indicates that sectors and occupations see a need for standards transcending national borders within their respective areas of work. This is hardly surprising considering the existence of the European internal market and the general tendency towards an international economy. This tendency may also have been strengthened through the introduction of quality standards like ISO.

In most cases, work is initiated through the analysis of existing arrangements in the countries represented in the partnership. On this basis, the identification of common core is pursued, bringing a European added value to the existing national approaches. Building consensus is an important part of the project processes. Achieving this is necessary to proceed to the next stage where actual solutions, in the form of tools, standards and/or modules are expected. The steps identified in our discussion of the 1995 projects can be identified in the 1996 projects as well.

5.3.1. Profile of sectoral projects

A distinction has been made between projects working with competences applicable to several fields of work (transoccupational competences) and projects focusing primarily on specific occupations.

Sectoral projects 1996

	Primary sector	Secondary sector	Tertiary sector	Number of projects
Trans-occupational competence		control techniques, joining techniques, clerical staff for industry	security service, interior decorators	5
Specific fields, occupational or sectoral	Agriculture, forestry	food industry, construction, automobile industry, steel work, biotechnique, chemical industry, energy techniques, pulp and paper, stone work, process industry	business, tourism, fire fighting, conservation, health and personal service, transport, horticulture, window dresser, floral design, environment, culture (opera), design craft trade, geographers	53
Number of projects	4	17	37	58

5.3.2. Scope of the projects with sector focus

If the projects are classified according to their basic objectives, the following picture emerges.

Primary sector

Four projects can be linked to the primary sector. Their planned 'products' can be divided into two main categories:

- (a) joint syllabi and standard qualification requirements,
- (b) monitoring development in skills.

Following the standard working model, the first group of projects tries to implement new training profiles on the basis of analysis of existing practices. This is an effort to give answers to changes in work organisation and technology. The second group of projects is similar, but aims more explicitly at developing qualification standards and methodologies for assessment and recognition of skills already acquired. An example is represented by the project D 1826, 'Incorporating waste water treatment technology into CVT in the viniculture sector,' where a joint undertaking with four European wine-growing countries will define standardised qualification requirements for dealing with waste water disposal. Development of training material will be a part of this.

Secondary sector

In the secondary sector, the following four main elements can be identified in most projects:

- (a) analyses of skills standards, requirements profiles, terminology;
- (b) establishment of assessment procedures;
- (c) development of syllabi, modules, courses;
- (d) certification and recognition arrangements.

A majority of the projects in the secondary sector work according to one or more of these elements.

In the motor vehicle industry, for example, there is a project (D 1185, 'European motor vehicle system engineering') on electronic control of gears and the use of microprocessors. The project looks into qualitative and quantitative criteria for measuring competences and will develop a curriculum based on these results. Training modules and short courses will follow. The idea is that continuing training must be based on a good understanding of existing competences, thus the emphasis on 'measurement'.

Another project (EL 5490, 'Key competences. New methods and anticipation of the evolution of qualifications in the metal sector due to industrial change and their mutual recognition') in the steelwork sector, is aimed at identifying and analysing qualifications, training and practices evolving due to industrial change. Transversal competences in the technical area will be validated and mutually recognised within the framework of a 'portfolio.' The partners hope that their work will 'lead to mutual recognition of transversal competences in the steelwork sector, notably within the framework of collective agreements and contractual policies.' There is also a project on terminology (EL 5550, 'Thalis – Terminology hypermedia analyses and learning in science and technology'). This project has counterparts in other areas and works towards acceptable and harmonised scientific/technical terminology. The project 'will streamline scientific communication and technology transfer at institutional level.'

Project EL 1988, 'Multimedia training assessment of qualifications in the food and drink industry', aims at production of educational material and the development of a new approach for assessment and recognition of prior learning. A single source of information, administered by an international liaison office, will be developed. A slightly different but interesting approach is represented by the project D 2483, 'Educational processes in lean and learning companies with particular regard to lifelong learning.' Vocational learning process in new company organisational structures will be investigated in nine case studies to identify how learning processes are established in lean and learning organisations (automobile industry, electric and electronic industry and service-providing departments of trade and industry). The expected results are strategies for improving the coordination of formal and informal training and ensuring greater transparency in recognising skills acquired both inside and outside the company. The results will be drawn on the basis of the survey results.

As indicated above, the 1995 and 1996 projects follow the same working model. The 1996 projects have a stronger focus on assessment and recognition of prior and/or non-formal learning. In most cases this is intrinsically linked to the development of common (European or international) qualification requirements and standards.

Tertiary sector

The projects belonging to the tertiary sector work according to the same basic approach described above.

In tourism, the project I 5313, 'Development of methods and material for the improvement of initial and continuing training in the tourism and catering sector,' compares occupational profiles in the partnership countries to develop teaching methods and set up arrangements for certification. The aim is to create an instrument for permanent updating of tourism-sector workers. Another project in tourism is F 2051, 'A multisite, multimedia skills-evaluation and development system for the tourism industry'. The aim is to set up a self-assessment system for enterprises in the sector. The idea is to use electronic means (a 'multisite multimedia company simulation') making skills assessment and self-evaluation possible.

D 1489, 'Development and testing of country-specific further qualification modules for tradespeople and young employees in restoration-related trades from Germany, Spain, France and Poland', aims at the development of pan-European qualifications through training courses for bricklayers and stonemasons. A pooling of know-how in the partner countries will be conducted in order to establish a basis for the new qualifications. The same approach is used in F 4606, 'The development and implementation of a transnational training module in health and social care education in EU countries'. The objective is to create a European training module for students in health and social care. The hope is to be able to support a certain harmonisation within these areas in Europe. Modules will be based on shared definitions of relevant core skills in modern health and social care within Europe.

D 3740, 'Development of design qualification for craft and trade professions', and D 1881, 'European continuing training network for professional geographers', both analyse the need for further qualifications in the context of a European labour market. The aim is to define common training requirements at European level. These requirements will form the basis for common training modules and testing/certification systems.

In the sales sector, there is one project with a somewhat different aim. F 1773, 'Feasibility study on a European observation centre for qualifications and employment in the sales sector'. This project's ambition is to test the feasibility of a European observation centre for recruitment needs. Such an observation centre would play a core role in defining and designing continuing training in the sector.

The projects belonging to the tertiary sector operate according to the following main objectives:

- (a) analyses of skills standards, requirements profiles, terminology;
- (b) establishment of assessment procedures;
- (c) development of syllabi, modules, courses;
- (d) certification and recognition arrangements.

The pattern observed in 1995 is continued and strengthened in the 1996 projects. Counting both years, more than 50 different sectors/occupations are covered. As illustrated, these sectors/occupations cover a broad scope of the economy, from agriculture to public services.

The fact that projects basically work according to the same model and objectives, irrespective of sectoral and occupational differences, may be interpreted in two different ways. Firstly, the predominating focus on qualification requirements, qualification standards, assessment methodologies and certification systems may be looked upon as an expression of actual needs, experienced at individual or enterprise level. Secondly, the predominating focus can be looked upon as a reflection of the call for tender more than a reflection of a need experienced by individuals or enterprises.

Whatever the balance between these two interpretations, a programme like Leonardo da Vinci is able to set the agenda in a very distinct and consequential way. This is clearly proved by the fact that more than 50 sectors and occupations were working in this area by 1996.

6. Profile of the transparency-relevant projects of 1997

6.1. Introduction

The 1997 Leonardo da Vinci projects were studied in basically the same way as those in 1995 and 1996. We limit our study to the basic objectives and profiles of the projects to see how the question of transparency is covered and what emphasis it attracts (³²).

The call for proposals for the 1997 projects is basically identical to that for 1996 (³³). Once again, transparency is covered under Priority 1, 'The acquisition of new skills', putting the same emphasis on projects focusing on 'competences complementary to formal competences' and on methodologies and systems to facilitate assessment and validation of these.

A total of 72 projects were identified as dealing primarily with the issue of transparency. The profile and content of the 1997 projects is not very different from that identified in the two previous years.

As in 1995 and 1996, we divide the 1997 projects into two main groups. Of these, 23 deal with the transparency issue on a general level and 42 others focus on one specific sector or occupation.

6.2. Projects with a general focus on transparency

Projects classified as having a general focus on transparency cover mainly the same approaches identified before:

- (a) improving VET in a European perspective - 7 projects;
- (b) key skills/cross-disciplinary skills - 2 projects;
- (c) certification/validating skills and competences - 6 projects;
- (d) reference centre - 1 project;
- (e) language - 7 projects.

The first three groups of projects with a general focus on transparency have counterparts in projects of earlier years. There are projects, which will add a European dimension to VET by different means, projects on holistic European perspectives with regard to key skills and core competences as well as projects focusing on certification at a general level.

(³²) An electronic search was conducted using the concepts 'transparency,' 'recognition' and 'certification' as points of departure.

(³³) Journal officiel des Communautés européennes, 17.12.1996.

A new phase of the Netref project from 1995 (discussed above) can also be found in the 1997 compendium. The main objective is to further develop the decentralised approach they have worked with. The transnational network of national reference structures for vocational qualifications will be broadened and deepened. New partners are joining the project.

The seven projects in the language group represent variations on the same theme. They aim at validation of language skills against a common European background. Some of them plan for centres while others are restricted to certain occupations or groups of people. Almost all will develop assessment tools and modules for training.

6.3. Projects with a sector focus on transparency

The following projects have been identified as predominantly working at a sectoral/occupational level. Some projects tend to cross traditional dividing lines between sectors/occupations (laser technology, welding, etc.) but to a certain extent this can be looked upon as the development of new job-categories, reflecting changes in traditional division of labour, not least caused by changes in technology and organisation. The remaining projects work according to a more limited agenda, focusing on one single occupation or sector:

- (a) primary sector - 3 projects,
- (b) secondary sector - 26 projects,
- (c) tertiary sector - 20 projects.

The three projects in the primary sector aim at developing European-level qualifications or certification systems eventually leading to harmonised training modules.

In the secondary sector, 7 out of 26 projects cross-traditional borderlines between sectors/occupations. These projects try to develop qualifications applicable to fields such as laser fibre optic techniques, vehicle electronics, information technology, welding and safety within construction and industry. Two projects in the tertiary sector have the same character. The rest of the project stock of 1997 targets specific areas or occupations.

Thirty-five different occupational fields are represented in 1997, almost the same number as in 1996. Hotel, health care, business, automobile industry, docker and maritime transport, building industry and electro-mechanics, are fields represented by two or more projects.

Below is an overview of projects with a per sector approach to transparency in 1997. The occupational fields covered are exemplified in the cells. A distinction is made between projects working with competences applicable to several fields of work and projects focusing primarily on specific occupations. The borderline is sometimes blurred and it is fair to say that projects focusing on specific fields of occupations can comprise work on 'new job' profiles and more general competences.

Sectoral based projects 1997

	Primary sector	Secondary sector	Tertiary sector	Number of projects
'Trans-occupational competence'		laser fibre optic, vehicle electronics, information technology, welding techniques	management systems, meeting management	9
Specific fields of occupations	Water policy, vine, environment care vine, training for fishmongers	Industry, natural gas, textile industry, docker and maritime transport, building, refrigeration and air condition, metallurgy, wood industry, automobile, electro mechanics, chemical industry, aerospace industry	health, veterinary nurse, business, hotel, radio production, information and documentation, social economics, European council work, large households management	40
Number of projects	3	26	20	49

As in 1996, questions of qualification requirements, qualification standards and assessment methodologies/systems are to the fore in 1997 projects. Again this is intended to form the basis for the development of training modules applicable at European level.

Comparing the objectives and profiles of the 1995, 1996 and 1997 projects, a certain uniformity can be observed. This is especially the case for those projects working on a sectoral or occupational level. Most projects try to proceed from an analysis of the current level of qualifications and competences towards a shared (European) set of qualification requirements. This basis, which can be given many names (qualification standard is one), is then used for the development of assessment procedures, curriculum elements, training modules and certification systems. Obviously there is a commitment to creating something useful which can inspire action and judgement in a coherent way and from shared points of departure. The high number of participants involved, together with their close link to the occupational fields in question, is a crucial part of the Leonardo 'exercise.' Participants share a common problem and, hopefully, a common desire to reach some form of consensus.

7. Summary: Transparency-relevant projects 1995, 1996 and 1997

In the previous chapters we focused on the aims and objectives of the projects on transparency. We will also look at results and impacts, but first a brief summary.

The table below gives an overview of the number of projects within the Leonardo da Vinci programme as a whole, and those dealing with the transparency issue.

	1995	1996	1997	Total
Total number of projects	749	793	730	2272
Placement and exchange programmes	121	170	188	479
Pilot projects	581	582	495	1 658
Survey and analyses projects	47	41	47	135
Projects on transparency (total number)	79	75	72	226
Projects with a general focus	16	17	23	56
Projects with a sector focus ⁽³⁴⁾	63	58	49	170
Primary	2	4	3	9
Secondary	41	17	26	84
Tertiary	20	37	20	77

A total of 226 out of 1 793 projects (the placement and exchange programme is not included) have been identified as dealing with transparency of vocational qualifications almost equally spread over the three-year period studied. More than three quarters of these have a sector focus of which only a few have been found in the primary sector (agriculture, forestry, and fishing).

⁽³⁴⁾ As mentioned, we apply a simple division between primary, secondary and tertiary sectors.

Projects working on a general level in the 1995 batch, have been grouped under six different approaches:

- (a) comparability,
- (b) database,
- (c) reference centre,
- (d) certificate supplement,
- (e) assessment,
- (f) quality standard.

These general approaches to transparency identified in 1995, have been followed up by the 1996 projects. However, the focus has narrowed and projects tend to combine work on strategies of assessment with certification and recognition procedures, making it logical to combine these two approaches. Two main approaches are left: the assessment/certification approach and the quality standard approach. The first comprises work on establishing common European certification formats/frameworks, normally combined with the development of assessment methodologies. Several of these projects can be seen as efforts to develop automated (IT or internet-based) methodologies for assessment. The second approach focuses on training institutions and contains projects aimed at creating instruments for comparison of the quality of their training. Such measures are expected to positively influence competences among vocational training instructors and tutors.

On the basis of experience in projects working on a general level, we can conclude that the Leonardo programme has been successful in bringing forward committed partnerships, ideas and suggestions for practical solutions, but at the same time represents a major challenge to more efficient dissemination of results and an improved link to potential users of project results. In most cases, projects have spent relatively limited time and energy on the dissemination of results. The impact of the projects, in terms of developing better solutions and systems, is thus uncertain. This problem is increased due to the temporary character of the work; ideas run the risk of disappearing with the disappearance of the project framework.

Compared to the group of projects working on a general level, the homogeneity of the sectoral projects is striking. While we have been able to identify different approaches to transparency in the group of general projects, we can identify one basic model applied by the projects in the sectoral group. Some minor differences exist, but the objectives, along with working methods, are almost identical from project to project. We have described the 'ideal typical' sectoral project in the following way:

- (a) the general objective is to support sectoral convergence in the area of training, initial and/or continuing training, in the sector. A majority of projects envisage a 'European' training approach as their final objective;

- (b) the first step is to initiate an investigation/survey into the skills needs and current skills supply (quantity) in the sector;
- (c) the second step is to initiate an analysis of existing training practices in the sector, both in terms of substance and curricula and in terms of pedagogical approaches and training tools;
- (d) the third step consists of an outlining of relevant qualification criteria for the sector, often the development of specific European curricula;
- (e) the fourth step consists of the development of assessment and validation methodologies. These methodologies are necessary in order to identify skills needs on individual and enterprise levels;
- (f) the fifth step consists of the development of training modules on the basis of the steps described above, including manuals for trainers and for self-training;
- (g) the sixth step consists of the development of 'training tools' normally in the form of CD-Roms, videos and internet web pages;
- (h) the last step consists of the testing of these modules and tools in the partner countries.

It could be added that another element and a final step often consists of methods or tools for certification.

Not all projects cover all elements. Some variations exist as to the emphasis on the different points but this does not affect the basic model outlined above. The 1996 projects, reflecting the emphasis of the call for tender, have a stronger focus on assessment and recognition of prior and/or non-formal learning. In most cases this is intrinsically linked to the development of common (European or international) qualification requirements and standards. As in 1996, questions of qualification requirements, qualification standards and assessment methodologies/systems are to the fore in 1997 projects. Again this is intended to form the basis for the development of training modules applicable at European level.

Comparing the objectives and profiles of the 1995, 1996 and 1997 projects, a certain uniformity can be observed. This is especially the case for those projects working on a sectoral or occupational level. Most projects try to proceed from an analysis of the current level of qualifications and competences towards a shared (European) set of qualification requirements. This basis, which can be given many names (qualification standard is one), is then used as a basis for the development of assessment procedures, curriculum elements, training modules and certification systems. Obviously there is a commitment to create something useful which can inspire action and judgement in a coherent way and from shared points of departure. The high number of participants involved, together with their close link to the occupational fields in question, is a crucial part of the Leonardo 'exercise'. Participants share a common problem and, hopefully, a common need to reach some form of consensus.

The sectoral projects combine a genuine 'bottom up' approach with the clear objective of European harmonisation and standardisation of vocational qualifications. This voluntary

approach towards convergence is interesting, especially in a situation where harmonisation by political/legal means is ruled out.

Within the three years studied, more than 50 different sectors/occupations are covered. As illustrated, these sectors/occupations cover a broad spectrum of the economy, from agriculture to public services.

The fact that projects basically work according to the same model and objectives, irrespective of sectoral and occupational differences, may be interpreted in two ways. Firstly, the predominating focus on qualification requirements, qualification standards, assessment methodologies and certification systems may be looked upon as an expression of actual needs experienced at individual or enterprise level. Secondly, the predominating focus can be looked upon as a reflection of the call for tender more than a reflection of a need experienced by individuals or enterprises. Whatever the balance between these two interpretations, a programme like Leonardo da Vinci is able to set the agenda in a very distinct and consequential way. This is clearly proved by the fact that more than 50 sectors and occupations are involved in this area.

8. Results and impact

8.1. Introduction

So far, our main emphasis has been on the aims and objectives of the transparency projects. Now it is time to try to assess the results and impact of the projects. We will approach the task through an analysis of the experiences of a limited sample of projects. Our aim is not to 'judge' or 'control' the projects, but to highlight factors which have proven decisive for their success or otherwise.

Transnational work, depending on confidence and a minimum of consensus, is time-consuming. The Leonardo da Vinci projects operate (mostly) over a three-year period and results must be viewed accordingly. Given the timespan, we can observe projects with varying degree of success. A number of them have failed to survive the first year. Others have been forced to seek new partners, adjust their scope, etc., while a substantial number have been able to reach the basic objectives outlined from the start. Important 'success factors' seem to be a well-defined and well-delimited area of work, making consensus-building relatively easy, along with working in areas where the need for solutions is strong.

To establish a more comprehensive picture of the results and impact of Leonardo da Vinci projects on transparency, a short questionnaire was sent to a sample of project coordinators in July 1999 ⁽³⁵⁾. Few of these project coordinators answered directly. Only 9 out of 40 enquiries were returned within the requested deadline. A follow-up reminder produced a few more responses, but the exercise had to be further followed up by a visit to the archives of the programme, located at the technical (CLEO) office, to gather the information sought. From this combined approach it was possible to track approximately 10 % of the projects launched during the years 1995, 1996 and 1997. It is worrying that so few project coordinators give priority to the sharing and dissemination of project experience. In some cases, the lack of response can be attributed to outdated telephone numbers and addresses, but not in every case.

Our aim is to try to identify the factors relevant and crucial to understanding the work process and the final outcome of projects. It should be stressed that our sample is small and designed to cover different types of projects. In addition, the response rate to our questionnaire was low so we had to lower our empirical ambitions ⁽³⁶⁾. Consequently, we are unable to describe and

⁽³⁵⁾ The following five questions were asked: (1) Which are the main results and/or achievements of the project (so far)? (2) Have project objectives and strategies been adjusted or changed during the work? If so, how and why? (3) What would you describe as the main challenges faced by the project (so far) – negative and/or positive? (4) Have results/achievements been disseminated (made know/utilised) outside 'the inner circle' of project partners (so far)? If so, to what extent and by which means? (5) How do you look upon the effects of the work and the results gained? What kinds of effects (short term, long term) can you see/have you seen (so far)?

⁽³⁶⁾ After some initial problems, our efforts to be allowed access to the archives of the programme were successful and we are very grateful to the staff of the CLEO office for their assistance. Due to rules of confidentiality and in accordance with our agreement with the CLEO office, we will not list the projects studied.

analyse single projects in full or in detail. By using parts of projects and experience gained through specific projects, we will illustrate more general patterns identified in the whole sample, which is sufficient for our purposes. The following three main questions were applied to the material:

- (a) what are the main characteristics of the results achieved?
- (b) what are the typical features of the development of projects?
- (c) which main factors influence the work and results of projects?

Through these questions it has been possible to analyse the data collected, identify characteristics of the results as well as the process of work, and identify factors influencing that process.

8.2. Results and factors influencing work

8.2.1. Main characteristics of results

Initially we would like to stress that 'final' results and effects of the Leonardo da Vinci programme are not yet in place, and, in several cases, not even in short-term perspective. Our report can give indications, but no final analysis is possible for the moment.

There are various products available from the projects we have studied. Printed material is abundant, together with information given during conferences. There are electronic versions of reports and booklets, promotional material such as leaflets, brochures, etc., and, in a few cases, exhibitions. Many projects can be found on the Internet, having a website of their own. The majority of these, however, contain only general information on the work and the partners involved. Very few comprise useful tools or final results.

A vast number of descriptions of the partners' different educational systems, as well as training modules, are produced by the projects. This seems to be the dominating working model. In an early stage of the work, partners' points of departure are described within the framework of the project and in a later stage, the process of how actions are agreed upon in order to cope with the problem in focus. The first stage mentioned gives descriptive data (mainly of the partners' training systems) and the latter, training modules, is intended for use on a European level. A majority of the projects report increased understanding, new levels of understanding and appreciation and respect for a partner's way of thinking.

A general impression is that the results of many of the projects still consist of draft material, that there is poor dissemination and a lack of implementation. The implementation of results,

Examples given are taken from material sent to us and are used as illustrations of more general observations made.

dissemination processes, taking advantage of results outside the inner circle of partners, etc. are issues that seem to remain unresolved. Of course, there are exceptions. In some cases dissemination is carefully planned and carried out. An excerpt from a project on European quality standards may serve as an example of the latter category:

The structure and organisational management of the project has been designed to allow continuous dissemination of best practice and innovation between partners... The partners will work to extend field-testing to more training suppliers, of different sizes and sectors, in addition to 'braiding' in representation from other Member States as appropriate... identifying, high level representatives of organisations that are important players in the infrastructure... expected to come together as an advisory group.

... Meetings will continue to be 'rotated' with the host partner responsible for inviting representative from interested, relevant external organisations... opportunities have been created for the partners to meet other interested parties in an informal setting... Presentation materials summarising the project are available to all partners in their own language. These will be used in a wide range of situations, including briefing other interested groups or organisations... The project manager, project coordinator and all partners will capitalise upon every available opportunity to discuss and disseminate the project, both to formal presentations and informally through networks of contacts.... In particular, details of EQS will be disseminated through the newly developing European regional educational network.'

This fairly long quotation shows width as well as depth in the dissemination process and is relatively rare. Whether or not the plan will come to fruition remains to be seen. It may represent more of a desirable state of things rather than reality.

To sum up, we may say that a certain number of projects, constituting a certain profile, have focused on the relevant issues and produced a huge amount of results. What was aimed for at the outset has been mostly achieved, even if not in a streamlined way and without adjustments. There are numerous analyses made of different elements of VET systems in Europe, many training modules and accompanying assessments and certification procedures produced and an improvement in the understanding of diversity within the Community. All this is documented on paper or in electronic form. Yet, it must be noted that if projects are to be considered successful in terms of their use and application of results, then there is certainly room for improvement. To have real access to results from 'outside,' as we have experienced, is both difficult and time consuming.

8.2.2. Features of development

The following elements have been identified as typical main features of the development of projects within the stock of projects studied:

- (a) changing of ambitions;

- (b) strengthening of management;
- (c) prolongation of projects;
- (d) discontinuation of work.

We will discuss these one by one. The elements can be seen as different ways of coping with problems and are mainly connected to projects which do not follow plans in a streamlined way. It is fair to say that changes in relation to plans are more common than no changes and that (a) and (b) occur more frequently than (c) and (d). Changes, however, are to be expected and should not be seen as a purely negative circumstance. In many cases they stem from adjustments due to increased understanding and under-way findings. Several elements might, of course, be found in single projects.

(a) Changing of ambitions

There are mainly two strategies used when changing the ambitions of a project. One is goal retreat and the other is reducing empirical work or involvement of 'other partners. An example of the first is given by the Synchro project - 'Synchronisation and modularisation of training and continuing training in the protection of the worker and the environment in industry' (Austria 10016). The project aimed to define comparable international training standards and requirement profiles for delegates in worker and environment protection. A training module system and training material was to be developed on the basis of survey results.

Despite initial plans, the project had to change/broaden its aim when faced with an obvious need for internal communication within companies as well as the need for practical know-how regarding the interlinks between health and safety. The broadening of the aims of the project has led to a concentration on developing a 'trainer's guide,' meeting the different needs of various targets groups. The ambition of defining standards in the field was also abandoned. Another example is the Equal project - 'European qualification levels in welding practice' (Netherlands 337). The goal originally set was:

'... to develop new distance learning curricula, covering four welding processes and four materials, based on the specifications of the European welding federation. The partners also aim to establish an EWF qualification structure, develop recognition of welding training centres according to ETW standards, set up an authorised examination system, and create a test-item bank.'

Due to budget cuts, an adjustment was necessary and the new prerequisites were met by excluding an ambition to develop tools for distance learning and item banking for evaluation purposes. In addition, fewer material dimensions in the new EWF specifications were covered than originally planned. This has reduced the scope of the project outcomes. The project

began in mid-1998 and will run until at least the year 2000. Accordingly, it is not yet possible to see the final results, but the work process can already be used as a typical example ⁽³⁷⁾.

In other words, goal retreat, quantitatively or qualitatively, automatically reduces the level of ambition, as does spending less time and resources on empirical work or on anchoring activities outside the inner circle of the project. The following is reported by two of the projects:

'One phase of the project proved to be too difficult/much of work to be carried out in planned way: the social and health care service delivery comparison in partner countries together with social security. The service delivery systems are too different to be easily compared within this type of pilot project that includes several very large and hard phases.

... objective... was to work out training modules, to give trainers the flexibility they need when working in this field. We had to change/broaden this aim because it has turned out that the aspects regarding internal and external communication have to be taken more into account, so to improve the implementation within companies... it was necessary to adapt the product... to the needs identified by all the partners.'

Other projects report similar experiences. There are also examples implying reduced ambitions of the final product of projects. An impression is that diversities - hierarchical and/or cultural - have a strong impact on changes, meaning decreased levels of ambitions. One project could not finish the work and recommended a certain curriculum plan because of lack of political legitimacy in one Member State. Another reduced their ambitions by publishing a discussion paper instead of a recommendation. A third failed to agree on procedures and conditions for commercialisation of their results, etc.

(b) Strengthening of management

Strengthening of management and/or increased effort to keep up motivation of partners by overcoming language barriers, communication problems and cultural diversities are changes observed to improve work climate. An example can be given through the Decid project, 'Developing Euroskills in the information and documentation sector' (France 468). The project proposed drawing up an information/documentation skills card for each country and gaining recognition for it. On the basis of these national cards, a European skills card would be created to include various skill levels. These skills, together with the worker's qualifications, would then be assessed and their value enhanced by use in conjunction with a widely disseminated set of computer-based self-assessment tests.

Within the first phase of the project, the partners' network was established and a manual published - 'The guide to competences for European professionals in library and information

⁽³⁷⁾ The European welding federation (EWF), an organisation comprising members from the European countries, certifies training on certain welding techniques on a European level and takes an active part in harmonisation of education and training in the field.

services'. What is noticeable, is that the project faced strengthening of the work by having to overcome diversities such as: cultural heterogeneity; demands on new ways of thinking; overcoming different rhythms of work; and lack of prior experience to build on.

Another example can be seen in a project entitled: 'The development and implementation of a transnational training module in social and health care education in EU countries.' The final product is a book called TM workbook. The book is based on working life expectations gained through a survey conducted by the partners and comprises instructions for implementation of a training module (10-credit/400 hrs), assessment tools and reference materials such as vocabulary and working life survey results.

The objectives of the project have, as a whole, not been changed. A slight modification of ambitions had to be made due to a budget revision by the Commission. One part, planned on a comparison of social and health care delivery together with social security, had to be set aside. As the project reports:

'One practical challenge has been to inform and instruct all partners in a way that is detailed enough in different phases and turns of the project. We found that although English is the project language, one can always expect some slight misunderstandings to take place among partners. Therefore the contractor and the Dutch coordinator both try to secure that all partners are aware of proceedings of the project. The further the project has proceeded, the more detailed have the instructions become.

One challenge in transnational/international projects like this is the problem of timetables. As school years and terms are somewhat different, holidays and their extensions vary a lot, a mere fact remains that the number of efficient working months is not five per term. Actually it may be something like three-and-a-half per term. Therefore the Dutch coordinator has set up a sort of 'calendering' of the terms in order to avoid vain attempts to reach specific partners. This preplanning has proved worthy.'

(c) Prolongation of projects

There are two principal ways to prolong a project. One is to request more funding and the other is to spread the work over a longer period than planned. Few of the projects in our sample changed much as far as the timeframe was concerned. There are adjustments within projects and, in some cases, prolongation, but this is not the general pattern. Mostly the work is done during the period of funding and, in a few cases, we can see continuing work after the 'official' closure of work. The rare examples of changes in timeframes implies increased attention to the features of development of projects.

(d) Discontinuation of work

Only a few of the projects in our sample were closed ahead of the scheduled time. No systematic pattern relating to their aims and objectives could be identified.

8.2.3. Factors influencing the work process

The development of any project is, of course, dependent of factors inside and outside the project which influence the work process itself. On the issue of influence, we will focus on four main factors. These form parts of the frames within which the work process takes place and implies constraints as well as prospects. The frame factors we have observed as having significant influence in this respect are:

- (a) the specificity of the research questions;
- (b) the balancing of different interests;
- (c) the regulation complex;
- (d) random and accidental factors.

Some of the factors are connected with what could be labelled material or basic prerequisites. Others have a more organisational and ideological character. As far as the first three above-mentioned factors are concerned they can have either a positive or negative dimension. The fourth group of factors has mainly negative consequences in relation to the project work. The brief discussion on different factors that follows, is illustrated by projects or fragments of projects. It should be noted that the examples given serve the purpose of assisting the reader and are not meant to characterise any single project. The factors under discussion can be found in most of the projects to different degrees. Our ambition is not to characterise single projects but the stock of projects as a whole.

(a) The specificity of the research questions

The definition and limitation of the area of work seems to be a crucial factor for success. One aspect of this is the extent to which expected results find a specific user. Too wide a scope or an unclear border to the area of work cause difficulties. This is especially the case in a multicultural context such as the Leonardo da Vinci programme. A positive example of how to cope with this particular challenge might be found in the work of a project on: 'Viability of vocational training certificates in the labour market - transparency' (Italy).

The project provides common ground for discussing transparency by identifying national indicators of certificate transparency and quality information. Three national reports have been produced, six case studies (two in Italy, France and Germany respectively), a reading grid of transparency for certification devices, a common set of indicators and a glossary of the individuated indicators.'

The comparisons made of concrete experiences of certification have shown that 'the problem of transparency can be ascribed to certain "common objects" present in all situations'. These have been labelled macro-indicators, which constitute necessary key information making a certificate transparent. These indicators are proposed as a structure for a certificate supplement and are expressed as follows:

- (a) general information on the certificate holder serving to identify the holder and describe some personal characteristics which may create potential interest in considering the person for recruitment;
- (b) general information on the characteristics of the certificate serving to identify the institutional references contained, making it possible to recognise its collocation and 'value' (both formal and substantial) within the overall system of qualification management and labour market regulations;
- (c) information on the professional profile, serving to circumscribe and identify the occupational and professional area adopted as reference for defining skills contained in the certificate;
- (d) skills, specifying the vocational resources actually acquired by the individual (and institutionally sanctioned by the certificate device);
- (e) training standards, clarifying the training methods necessary to develop the vocational skills which are the object of certification;
- (f) evaluation standards, illustrating the methods used to judge the actual possession of the specific vocational skills.

According to the project, there is also a need for information on 'where to get further information.' This project has clearly searched for common elements, stretching them to a general level. The results seem promising insofar as they could be taken as points of departure for a broader approach. So far, only three countries have taken part, and, to our knowledge, the results have not spread to a great extent outside the inner circle of project partners.

However, the European forum in the field of transparency of vocational qualifications has used experiences from the work. We will return to this topic in Chapter 9.

Another example of the difficulties in working in a huge field is the experience of a project entitled 'Vocational qualifications, titles and transparency in health sector services in European Member States' (Greece). This project shares with many projects the problem of how to cope with conceptual diversities:

'... problems arose from the diversity of health systems in Europe and corresponding differences in modes of education, licensing and accreditation. Although we were well aware that such problems might exist, we discovered tremendous differences from county to country and also within countries, e.g. differences within states in Germany, or between Flemish and Walloon communities in Belgium.

... we encountered tremendous communication problems both with the partnership and with the experts employed on the decision on what is a 'white robe' professional i.e. which occupational titles should be included. This was partially resolved by creating an initial indicative list of professional titles. These professions were searched for in all Member States but often additional professions were added.'

The project developed a manual containing information on: all occupational titles in the health services in the EU; details of the requirements needed to obtain these titles in each Member State; conditions on education and training and analytic comparisons of the education requirements; and resulting titles and means of obtaining them. The material is available in printed and electronic form. Obviously, the wide scope in this case meant much unforeseen effort and working time in order to reach the goals set.

Another factor within this category, obviously facilitating consensus and influencing research questions, is the degree to which the work is carried through in a specific and well-established field.

'European framework for linguistic measurement and certification' (France 11), was completed in December 1997. The aim was to standardise European language evaluation in a manner suitable for companies, students, trainers and training centres. The main result was a book, *The Linguistic Eurogrid*, in five languages, listing different levels and describing aptitudes. This book is accompanied by a diskette allowing printing of individual profiles of language proficiency and preparation of a 'history' for every student.

As far as we know, companies use the product in different ways and there have been efforts to disseminate the book, at least in France. The field of languages, specifically the main European languages, has been analysed and mapped for many years. There is a huge amount of knowledge and know-how to lean on. This facilitates communication since the knowledge and know-how are often shared among specialists in the field.

The project 'Enhancing labour mobility through the development of core competences and the certification of acquired skills. Development of a methodology based on the experience of the European telecommunications industry (Xenofon),' can be used to represent a slightly different type of high value on a common-interest variable. The project has its base in three European telecom enterprises (Greece, Denmark and the UK). The objectives are grouped in the following four main areas:

- (a) analyse all measures undertaken by three enterprises at various stages of liberalisation with the aim of enhancing labour mobility within their organisation (or within the sector);
- (b) develop methodologies for better identification and forecasting of future skill requirements leading to a more efficient orientation of present skill certification systems;
- (c) identify the environment in the IT sector in order to comprehend the interaction of skill requirements between the firms and avenues for labour mobility within these. Particular attention is given to SMEs and their identification of skill requirements;
- (d) propose a methodology and establish standards, based on the experience gained through this project, for introducing systems of skill certification and for integrating this into the overall human resource training and development policies.

Xenofon was at the first stage, and half way through the project period, when we had the opportunity to learn about it in mid-2000. Phases (1) and (2) had been completed and the deliverables produced fulfilled the objectives originally set. There were some minor changes in the timetable due to problems beyond the control of the partners. The first two steps can be characterised as more or less internal analysis by the partners themselves. The first phase comprises establishing the partnership network, setting the specific tasks for the partners and studying the different systems in practice to enhance mobility in a changing environment. The second phase was to develop a framework enabling forecasting of future skill requirements in the telecommunications sector.

It should be noted that the project partners in this case are companies in the same sector with a common interest and access to resources if necessary. It is possible for the partners to control the process of work, especially during the phases reported so far. Also worth mentioning is the fact that the project work partly takes its point of departure from established methods, in this case 'to study and propose ways of orienting existing certification of skills systems (NVQ) towards future skill requirements and the future core competency standards. This will mainly be based on the BT (British Telecom, UK) and RSA (Royal Society of Arts, UK) experience.'

In summary, we can say that important factors influencing the work of the Leonardo da Vinci programme relate to the base from which the work is launched, the problems or questions dealt with and the shared interests of partners. Not surprisingly, the same goes for all research-oriented and developmental work but the international arena demands specificity, visibility and clarity in these respects.

It may also be mentioned that the anticipated variation in working methods and processes in connection with the 1995 projects initially identified has not been possible to verify. In spite of the 'openness' of the programme and the broad scope of sectors and occupations covered, the striking uniformity in working methods remains.

(b) The balancing of different interests

The Xenofon project can also be used as an example of where there is the potential to establish a fruitful balance of interests between the national and the transnational, and the degree to which common solutions are needed. An important part of this seems to be the potential use of results, which stresses the need of a user perspective in the work. Three other projects, all dealing with the transparency issue, also illustrate the relevance of this factor.

The Infomodels project works on certificate supplement. The concept is that of a brief (no more than one or two page) summary of a vocational qualification. The supplement would be presented in a standard format of headings, together with sufficient supporting information about the education and training system wherein the qualifications were awarded. The approach parallels the so-called 'diploma supplement,' developed to support the recognition of higher education qualifications. The work has resulted in a specification and format for a certificate supplement after testing and piloting in Member States. The information is presented under the following headings:

- (a) name of qualification;
- (b) status of qualification;
- (c) relevant occupation(s) or occupational area;
- (d) content of the qualification;
- (e) training, education and assessment;
- (f) important addresses for further information;
- (g) explanatory notes.

EuroCert is the result of another Leonardo da Vinci project on certificate supplement called 'Towards transparency' (ref. 3485). Their guidelines for a certificate supplement comprise the following headings (indicators):

- (a) title of certificate (original);
- (b) title of certificate (translated);
- (c) year (for which the information is valid);
- (d) prerequisites (for entry to the training);
- (e) personal profile (sector suited, typical skills of holder, EU training level);
- (f) duration of study;
- (g) mode (full time, part-time, college, work);
- (h) structure of the curriculum (broad structure, lists of subjects, modules, ISCED level);
- (i) training (work experience) (mode, duration);

- (j) assessment methodologies;
- (k) assessment procedures/verification (system used to monitor standards);
- (l) certification criteria (standards to be achieved, grading system used);
- (m) credits;
- (n) progression (to further education or training for a holder);
- (o) transnational agreements (if mutual agreements exist for the certificate or parts of it).

The last item illustrates the difficulty in incorporating the criteria of depth with brevity and simplicity and the importance of finding a balance between the different interests of stakeholders. It is fair to say that this is a main challenge faced by the three projects on certificate supplements. They have coped with it in different ways and come to similar, if not identical, solutions through balance. In these cases, the potential users are specified, which seems important.

A variation on this theme can be to build in flexibility within the approach chosen. The Netref project is a good example. The project, discussed earlier in this the report, can be seen as successful, but still at an experimental level where there the potential for different solutions in different countries. The main objective of Netref is to develop a new, decentralised approach to support transparency of vocational qualifications by making information on VET systems easily available. A point of departure has been that each Member State should have a specific national approach constituting the basis for a European structure.

Each partner will design a national reference structure. These structures may differ per Member State. To enable experiments with the exchange of information on education and training systems and individual qualifications, which will take place in Phase 4 of the project it seems relevant to choose some common starting points and to define minimal demands on national reference structures.

To define these minimal demands on national reference structures, decisions have to be made on specific issues. The synthesis supplies relevant information to found these decisions.'

The synthesis has led to three important recommendations with regard to the national reference structures which will be designed:

- (a) it is highly important that a national reference structure includes one or more first contact points, making the reference structure accessible to all those people who have a need for information on vocational qualifications;
- (b) the national reference structure should take into account current procedures and existing organisations which are in some way responsible for the provision and interpretation of information;
- (c) within each national reference structure one organisation has to be designated as the key organisation which will operate at international level and will be part of the international

network. Each key organisation will open up its own national reference structure to transnational organisations.

The work is still at an experimental stage and full implementation of the main idea of the project seems to need political, and perhaps also financial, support from the countries involved

(c) The regulation complex

The rules and routines of the programme administration established by the Leonardo da Vinci programme itself are often reported as a negative factor influencing the work.

'... we believe that the dissemination range and impact of our project would have been fostered if the international meeting we had originally proposed and requested by the end of the project, asking for an extension, would have taken place.

... we believe that if the international meeting had taken place as we initially proposed the product of our project would have had even a greater impact and ever larger dissemination tool. Instead we spent valuable time in organising this meeting at a later stage (since it was subsequently approved) having also to ask for extension of the project.'

Reduction of the funding of projects seems to be more of a rule than an exception. A typical reaction from projects is as follows:

'The current budget levels do not allow for a broader inclusion and dissemination to other European partners, as originally planned.... Minimal field testing with only a small group of training suppliers in each partner country has been possible. This is a particularly important point, as partners' experience shows that an initial critical mass of training providers can be a powerful tool for persuading others of the benefits of long-term commitment to a quality development system.'

And on the rules and regulations in particular:

'Due to the strict rules governing the distributions of project funds, it is technically difficult to encourage/support the involvement of private sector representatives in the project. Unless they become 'fully fledged' partners, technically speaking they are not eligible for reimbursement of travel and subsistence expenses. This means that we rely exclusively upon their goodwill in participating in the project. As the involvement of end-users is essential to the successful outcome of this project, it seems wholly reasonable that, at the very last, their travel cost should be met from project funds.'

and,

Following feedback after our Interim Report, changes were made to the methods of record-keeping ... this involved the bespoke development of an Excel spreadsheet by a Finance/IT specialist, without which it was deemed difficult to meet the very detailed requirements for finance recording/reporting.'

(d) Random and accidental factors

Circumstances outside or beyond the control of the project coordinator lead (in all the cases we have seen) to reasons for discontinuation of work or disturbance in the timetables of the projects. Naturally, there are different reasons why a project is discontinued, for instance, changes of interest among partners, organisational changes or lack of necessary support. Unforeseen changes in partners' commitment as well as their withdrawal usually cause problems leading to delay. Some of the discontinued projects could be characterised as those with high-level ambitions, aiming at solutions to very complex issues.

8.2.4. An overview

Lack of transparency of vocational qualifications is seen as one main obstacle to mobility. Mobility will increase, or at least possibilities for mobility will increase, if obstacles due to lack of transparency are removed. That is the general rationale behind much of the work.

The projects in our sample work with different approaches (but often strikingly similar strategies) taking this rationale as a general point of departure. All of them strive at solutions to the problem and seek to increase transparency in some way or within a certain field. In that respect they are all instrumental, but their focus differs, as do their approaches to the problem. As far as we can see, and as reflected by the project stock, there are two main ways to proceed. One is to work on understanding differences and to find general models to build on, e.g. certificates or certificate supplements. The other is to start at the input side and focus on the content and structure of training. Often the work is limited to part of the system and linked to a specific area or sector, making any overall solution difficult to pinpoint.

During the process of work a polarisation seems to occur. General approaches move towards even more general levels, while projects with ambitions to solve problems through work within certain curriculum fields have to make goal retreats to become more specific. There are several factors at work here, mainly, budget restrictions, cultural diversities and the project form itself. The constraints typical to Leonardo da Vinci projects produce a certain quality of results. The uniformity of work methods identified at the outset remains the main pattern throughout the project period studied. To solve a complex problem in a multicultural context on a tight budget within a limited period of time, means you have to simplify, by taking the problem to a more general level and reducing ambitions and scope. In turn, this decreases the potential to focus on dissemination and implementation of findings within given frames.

Consequently, the impact of projects will rely very much on what happens after the project period has ended, especially if a project has concentrated on a limited part within fields

governed by political considerations and decisions. The need for a political context, able to evaluate and implement results, should not be underestimated. Responsibility for overview and valorisation of the programme cannot be the responsibility of the single projects.

In the following chapter we will give an example of one option for dissemination and use of Leonardo da Vinci projects by establishing a specific tool where the technical and political aspects of the issue can be combined.

9. Use and implementation of results - an example

9.1. Background

In 1998 Cedefop published a report with the purpose of contributing to the analysis of the situation in the area of recognition and transparency of vocational qualifications ⁽³⁸⁾. The report summarises developments and explores ways of moving forward. One of the main concluding proposals in the report was to take a step further by creating a 'network' or a 'European interface' in the field. The proposal was described as a supportive action to add missing elements of overview and continuity and to assist the Commission in the establishment of necessary coherence between all actions in the field of transparency of vocational qualifications.

It was also stressed that the 'network' should be established and work according to three central aims or objectives (*ibid.* p. 35):

- (a) it should support the Member States and the European Commission in their efforts to establish permanent, reliable and mutually acceptable mechanisms (methodologies) for increasing recognition and transparency of vocational qualifications;
- (b) it should contribute to mutual understanding and commonly accepted interpretations of certification and validation systems within Europe, along with their further development, including exchange of information and experiences on the validation/accreditation of informal learning;
- (c) it should contribute to the establishment of coherence between all Community actions and specifically support and link the Leonardo da Vinci and other projects (related to transparency of qualifications) so as to increase their complementarity and secure better dissemination of results, and their wide implementation.

In November 1998 the European forum on transparency of vocational qualifications was established as a joint initiative of the European Commission and Cedefop to meet the needs expressed in the report. The role of the forum was, and still is:

- (a) to explore ways of removing obstacles to mobility due to lack of transparency of vocational qualifications;
- (b) to initiate an open-minded dialogue on how to utilise existing initiatives, instruments and institutions in a better way;
- (c) to elaborate on how to implement existing political solutions in a way which actually supports individual citizens and institutions;
- (d) to consider the need for new technical and political initiatives.

⁽³⁸⁾ Cedefop - European Centre for the Development of Vocational Training; Bjornavold, Jens; Sellin, Burkart. *Recognition and transparency of vocational qualifications; The way forward*. Luxembourg: EUR-OP, 1998.

It was intended that the forum would create a meeting place where representatives from the Member States of the EU/EEA, the social partners, the European Commission, the European training foundation (ETF) and Cedefop could face up to challenges in a more comprehensive way than before. The aim was to indicate possible practical solutions on the transparency issue to be considered by political authorities at Community, Member State or social partner levels.

The management board of Cedefop, representing ministries as well as the social partners, was asked to appoint representatives capable of communicating effectively with policy-makers at different levels as members of the forum. One person from each country and four from the social partners were appointed. All together, the group comprises about 30 persons.

The role of the European forum in using and utilising existing initiatives, and finding practical solutions, also implies the function of acting as a means or a tool to disseminate and implement the results of the Leonardo da Vinci programme. Potential for practical solutions can be found in the programme through the projects dealing with the issue of transparency.

9.2. The work and results of the forum

The forum held four meetings in 1999 and was able to agree on a joint action plan in December that same year. This was achieved through a strategy to work stepwise, to delimit measures to what was seen as realistic in order to implement and to reach consensus on proposals. Throughout the process there was assistance from a small group of technical experts including people from Cedefop and the Commission. The group prepared documents summarising previous work, invited experts to the forum for briefings and discussions and summarised progress made. An important part of the material used had its origin in projects within the Leonardo da Vinci programme ⁽³⁹⁾.

The work of the forum in 1999 was based on consensus about the strategic policy issue: transparency was to be pursued as a supporting mechanism to achieve the goal of increased mobility. Discussions at forum meetings focussed on operational approaches; which ones would enhance transparency of vocational qualifications?

The wish was to solve a problem within a well-defined field where a lot of knowledge exists and may be used. The fact that the field is well-defined is important. The approach was to find and implement concrete solutions, not to discuss how to define or delimit a field.

Working from an evaluative perspective, materials (decisions, methods, instruments, etc.) were studied and reviewed in a systematic way. Existing 'solutions' were revisited, made visible and evaluated in light of the present situation. The process during the first year of work

⁽³⁹⁾ A draft version of this report has been presented to the forum, and representatives of Leonardo da Vinci projects dealing with certification supplements and networks for information, have been invited to meetings.

thus covered both technical and political aspects of the issue, and the measures agreed upon through the joint action plan built on a shared knowledge of what is possible and preferable, from a technical as well as political point of view.

The key features of the work of the forum to date can be summarised as follows:

- (a) forum members were committed to the task and actively participated in the work, both at and between meetings;
- (b) there was a consultative process in Member States, which ran parallel with forum meetings. This ensured effective sharing of information with relevant players in each country;
- (c) there was a spirit of partnership among forum members, resulting in the development of a broad consensus and shared goals across Member States and among social partners;
- (d) there was significant participation by candidate countries, facilitated by the European training foundation (ETF). This led to a valuable exchange of information and indicated opportunities for greater inclusion and integration in the future;
- (e) the technical working group advanced the work of the forum by preparing documents, facilitating working sessions and incorporating the feedback from discussion into the successive drafts of the final proposal;
- (f) the collaboration between the Commission and Cedefop was effective in steering the work of the forum on both policy and operational levels.

As mentioned, the European forum has been able to agree on a joint action plan (February 2000) ⁽⁴⁰⁾. The plan comprises two main, first stage measures to improve transparency. The first is the implementation of a format of descriptive certificate supplements to enable vocational qualifications to be more easily understood outside the home country. The second is the establishment of a European structure of national reference centres (points) able to give information on educational systems to employers or others who need it. Additionally, some supportive actions are proposed, of which translation services supported at Community level are the most central.

9.3. Conclusion

The problem faced by the European forum on transparency is not purely a technical problem, but one with social and political ramifications (as most problems have in the field of education). The concept of transparency has a history and solutions exist based on research as well as council resolutions and recommendations. But few have paid attention to or implemented the existing legal framework. The European forum seems to have been able to unite different levels in the system and to find practical solutions which Member States and the social partners can accept and support.

⁽⁴⁰⁾ European forum in the field of transparency of vocational qualifications. *Achieving mobility by improving transparency of vocational qualifications: A proposal for action*. Available through Cedefop - European Centre for the Development of Vocational Training, or, the European Commission, DG Education and Culture. February 2000.

At the moment (August 2000) there is process under way to seek possible ways of placing what the transparency forum has agreed upon into the decision-making structure of the European Union. One possibility being discussed is the drawing up of a cooperation charter between respective partners to summarise forum proposals into their technical details, and chart the way for their voluntary implementation. Most likely, however, the forum's proposals will be included as part of a council and parliament recommendation on mobility and decided upon during the French presidency in the second half of the year 2000. If the procedures for approval of a mobility recommendation come to fruition as planned, the work of the European forum should be viewed as a successful implementation of the Leonardo da Vinci projects involved.

In the European forum on transparency, experiences and knowledge from the Leonardo da Vinci programme have been used within a more or less political context. By establishing a meeting place designed for dialogue and mutual exchange of ideas, a tool has been created for steering the desire for increased transparency in a way that mirrors the complexity of the problem while also resulting in implementation of project results. The members of the forum taking part in these dialogues hold positions in the Member States enabling them to speak on behalf of the States and to take the results back home. The support given to them consists mainly of summaries and overviews of what is already known or has already been done. The process now under way seems to be gathering its own momentum. Awareness of what is possible and not possible, by what means, at what time and in which contexts, has increased throughout the conversations, leading to optimal use of experiences and knowledge in the field. We have not seen the final results yet (August 2000), but what we have seen looks promising.

The European forum in the field of vocational qualifications can be seen as one possible approach to the dissemination and implementation of the Leonardo da Vinci programme. Both main measures proposed by the forum build on results from Leonardo projects, thus taking them from an experimental to an implementation stage. Means and competences outside projects have been added, so obviously the interaction between different levels and different contexts has been fruitful in leading to use of the work produced in an experimental setting. It should be noted that the projects used in this exercise were those that worked on what we call a 'general level.' Potential for further work lies in the projects with a sector approach. These constitute the majority of the projects on transparency of vocational qualifications in the Leonardo da Vinci programme.

The approach used parallels the Leonardo da Vinci approach by being oriented more bottom up than top down. The voluntary character of the proposed actions has been stressed by the forum and has brought commitment by members as well as openness to diversities due to country-specific prerequisites. In our opinion the forum represents a useful tool for the implementation of results from the Leonardo da Vinci programme. At the same time, however, there is no guarantee that the same approach, used in another context, would similarly succeed. Educational issues vary between time and space and therefore cannot be

dealt with generally and in the same way. Each specific issue demands its own context and its own supportive powers. That is not to say that the approach represented by the European forum is of no value outside the field of transparency. In principle, the approach could be useful for implementing other results, but careful consideration would have to be given on how to proceed (according to content and organisation) in relation to the issue at hand.

10. Conclusions

As illustrated in our discussion of the 1995, 1996 and 1997 projects, the Leonardo da Vinci programme has increased and broadened the work dealing with the issue of transparency in a significant way. We have identified 226 projects which in some way work according to objectives relevant to the question of how to transfer qualifications and competences from one context to another (enterprise, occupation, sector, nation).

This emphasis on transparency is clearly linked to the political standpoints represented in the 1992 and 1996 Council resolutions presented in the first part of this report. Projects are promoted to bring forward voluntary cooperation and practical solutions in the form of instruments, methodologies and systems supporting increased transparency of qualifications

However, the programme seems to transcend the political perspectives presented in these resolutions. This is first and foremost exemplified through the high number of projects working on a sectoral level, supporting the development of harmonised qualification profiles on a European level. Several of these projects operate within areas which may be labelled as 'new technologies' and 'new services,' indicating that a certain standardisation and harmonisation process is occurring from below. Still, the majority of projects aiming at harmonisation at European level work within traditional occupations, sectors and branches

This is an interesting and new tendency and shows that the traditional legal approach, in its various forms, is supplemented by an alternative voluntary and industry-driven approach.

The experiences and results from the sector-based projects are extensive. A large number of tools aimed at increased transparency have been developed. Teaching modules within different fields and occupations, as well as other types of curriculum material, form a major category. Connected to these are assessment tools and recommendations on recognition and certification criteria. The texts produced on paper and/or electronically would easily fill several bookshelves and hard drives. Perhaps more important is the mutual learning coming from projects which, in many cases, has led to increased understanding of differences and different ways of thinking between countries. Almost all projects report that they have learned a lot, become better acquainted and developed a growing awareness of the complexities in the field. In the long-term perspective this is a promising result. Projects with a general focus share the experiences of positive commitment and hard work among partners. Their main results are less specific than those stemming from the sector projects. They give sample recommendations and frames of reference to be further considered by Member States and the Community. Also, these projects have produced useful and interesting material, thus assisting the step forward to increased transparency of vocational qualifications. Several of them have been of use to the European forum on transparency.

Those close to the projects of the Leonardo da Vinci programme are very much aware of the limitations of the project form. The projects can be characterised as 'case studies,' operating on the basis of (relatively) low budgets, a limited time scale, and having limited impact on decision-making processes in enterprises as well as in the public realm. They can, however, highlight and illuminate the wider context of the issue, show possible action alternatives and underline the potential for development.

Those involved stress the element of trust inherent in the projects. In most cases, the partnerships are crucial in developing trust and understanding where this did not exist before. While difficult to measure, this element may be consequential for the long-term success of this work. We see several examples of project partnerships developing into new partnerships in other areas. This is not only because people try to accumulate resources, but also because genuine cooperation has been initiated.

The nature and balance of partnerships is crucial. The competence of people involved is important, but even more important is the institutional base of the partners. The projects can be characterised as 'development agents' and rely on their ability to 'sell' a solution to relevant users and 'buyers.' If the objective is to accomplish change, partners isolated from their respective national contexts can present a problem.

Projects need to exchange ideas and experiences with people and institutions facing parallel challenges. Such an exchange of ideas and experiences could have been accomplished within the Leonardo programme itself, but this has only partly taken place. Synergy could be supported by using a 'clustering strategy,' allowing related projects to cooperate. The initiatives from the Commission in 1996 in this direction were positive, but need to be improved both in terms of the selection of cooperating projects and also the working forms applied. The European forum in the field of transparency of vocational qualifications represents one possible way of working.

Potentially good results from a Leonardo project have to build on an in-depth dialogue where rationales are made explicit, there is a good overview of local as well as central policies and good dissemination strategies exist on different levels. A project has to compete for attention; it cannot take for granted that a good idea will be welcomed by those parts of the institutional establishment responsible for implementation. Obviously they need support in this respect.

The Leonardo da Vinci approach can be looked upon as an effort to create something supranational from a bottom-up position. The legitimacy of solutions will be much better if they reflect actual needs identified by real users. A problem, though, will be the implementation of results outside the project group. Dissemination strategies and links to decision-making bodies are crucial elements if good project ideas are to be transformed into permanent solutions.

We see projects coping successfully with these challenges but this is not necessarily the case when taking the whole picture into account. This is especially true when it comes to dissemination strategies and links to decision-making bodies. According to our observations there are different factors at work creating a tendency towards less emphasis on dissemination or broader use of results during the project process. This can partly be explained by the fact that a limited timeframe is applied to achievement of the results in the first place. Moreover, it is possible to question whether the dissemination issue is a primary responsibility of single projects. Their bases of work are confined to certain areas, their scope specialised and their frames of reference more focused on a specific issue, as opposed to the overall context of that specific issue. In addition, the projects are expert-oriented in a field where final decisions have to be taken on a political level taking into account financial as well as ideological conditions. Perhaps one strategy could be leaving the 'use of the results' problem to a next step and in the hands of those who ultimately will make the final decisions.

Generally speaking, the success of a project can be said to depend on four distinct stages, demanding different methodologies of work, different judgements and different links to the social and political context.

Firstly, we can identify a descriptive stage. Most of the projects discussed so far have covered this stage. The description and analysis of the current situation or problem is the common starting point for the majority of projects in the programme. This is clearly illustrated in the 'working model' described on the basis of the 1995 sectoral projects.

Secondly, we can identify a learning stage. This learning stage is an important and visible part of the projects studied so far. By gathering project partners from different countries and institutional settings, an immediate exchange of experiences and points of view is begun. The quality of this learning stage clearly varies. The ability to define a common perspective is, however, crucial if practical results are to be achieved.

Thirdly, successful descriptive and learning stages make it possible to identify controversial issues. This is what we may term the normative stage. Finding practical solutions is also a question of deciding between different preferences, values and perspectives. Successful implementation may depend on the willingness to identify these controversial elements of the project and be willing to enter a process of 'negotiation' in order to find a solution.

Lastly, entering the decision stage, questions of consensus and legitimacy become increasingly important internally in the project. We can identify a distinction between situations where participants try to avoid predefined conclusions (in order to reach solutions that are as optimal and acceptable as possible) and situations where participants negotiate on the basis of predefined conclusions. At this stage, implementation depends on the ability of project-partners to link to the relevant external context and their ability to 'sell' project-internal decisions to the relevant external context.

It is our impression that the main emphasis of the Leonardo da Vinci programme is on the two first stages, less on the two remaining. This leads to an obvious risk that solutions will be confined to the archives.

Much of the work is sector-based and reflects a tendency towards increased interest in, and pressure on, VET from industry as well as service and public sectors. Making use of a distinction between arenas for formulation and others for realisation of educational goals, we can state that there is a growing number of formulation arenas. Traditionally, goals, setting and steering educational systems, have been a responsibility of the state in cooperation with the social partners in most European countries. With the huge Leonardo da Vinci programme, formulations of aims and objectives, as well as curricula for vocational education and training, are being done on a broad basis in different settings. Arenas of formulation not only have a central localisation, they can also be found on local or sector levels. Evidently, this can lead to improvements and innovation if directed properly. The development reflects the general tendency towards decentralisation and deregulation dominating many of the educational systems in Europe.

Our impression of the projects in the Leonardo programme is that less emphasis is put on dissemination and use of results than on producing products. As stressed earlier, strategies for dissemination and use of experiences from the Leonardo da Vinci projects need strengthening as well as monitoring but, also as mentioned earlier, perhaps this is not a primary responsibility of the projects but of the programme itself.

The European forum in the field of transparency of vocational qualifications constitutes an interesting example of how to achieve consensus and get practical concrete results on a European level. In the work of the forum it has been possible to benefit from the experiences of the Leonardo programme in the effort to improve transparency through certificate supplements and information networks.

Today's situation is characterised by a multitude of interesting projects, committed participants, a growing amount of valuable information and experience on national as well as European levels. Both Member States and Community institutions should address these challenges in the coming period. Such focus is necessary if the work of the Leonardo da Vinci programme is to result in practical solutions serving individuals as well as enterprises throughout Europe.

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Transparency of vocational qualifications: The Leonardo da Vinci approach

Jens Bjørnåvold, Sten Pettersson

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The right of European citizens to live and work in different Member States is fundamental to the achievement of full economic and social integration within the European Union. Despite the gradual removal of restrictions, transfer of skills from one Member State to another still remains a problem. This report attempts to give a brief overview of the situation within the area of transparency of vocational qualifications by presenting measures introduced at Community level and by drawing attention to projects within the Leonardo da Vinci programme dealing with the issue.

The report also presents the European forum in the field of transparency of vocational qualifications, which has been used for dissemination of Leonardo da Vinci projects. The transparency forum may point the way to more proactive Community policies to take full advantage of the results of Leonardo projects.

Jens Bjørnåvold and Sten Pettersson

Transparency of vocational qualifications

The Leonardo da Vinci approach

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