Green Paper on Learning Mobility

Contribution by CIMO, Centre for International Mobility, Finland, 12/2009
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Summary - Six key messages

In its reply to the Commission consultation on learning mobility, the Centre for International Mobility CIMO would like to call special attention to the following 6 key messages. These focal points also have a bearing on our answers to individual questions in the consultation.

1. Learning mobility should become an integral part of day-to-day work
Learning mobility should gradually be included as a formal part in the national and local school curricula, university degree programmes, and in the work plans of youth services. Otherwise, it will be difficult to win widespread acceptance for learning mobility – or sufficient resourcing needed for a full-scale learning mobility.

2. We need different kinds of mobility
There are no “one size fits all” solutions. A 10-year-old school child needs a different type of mobility than a school graduate, not to mention an early school leaver, young worker, or a 25-year-old law student with a family. Present mobility instruments should be evaluated to assess how they respond to the needs of different target groups, and whether new forms of mobility are needed. In particular, we should further develop the methods and approaches for “Internationalisation at Home”.

3. Mobility alone is not enough
Mobility should not be seen as a stand-alone activity. It is facilitated through other forms of transnational cooperation that also need to be encouraged. These include transnational projects and networks that support the development of common tools and working methods, and create new contacts.

4. Quality of mobility periods is key
Good experiences during the mobility periods are the best source of peer motivation. The quality of the mobility period is thus absolutely central, demanding more attention.

5. Return and life after a mobility period – an unaddressed challenge
The follow-up of the mobility period should be more systematically addressed to ensure that young people can process their learning experiences and use them later in life. This is as important as formal recognition and validation.

6. Involving young people
We can and should make more use of the experiences of young mobile people in all stages of learning mobility – information, motivation, networking, preparation, hosting, etc.

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1 Internationalisation at Home refers to the learning of international/intercultural skills and competences in the home country/organisation of the learner, e.g. through visiting teachers, professors or staff; incoming students or young persons; or virtual mobility.
1. Preparing for a Period of Learning Mobility

1.1 Information and Guidance

How can the availability of information and guidance related to mobility be improved?

Communication with young people should be of and for the youth
In communicating, we should utilise the experiences of those young people who have already been abroad. Peer talk works better than authority speak!

Facts should be complemented with stories and examples, as has been done, for instance, on the Finnish website www.maailmalle.net. While the use of video clips is also efficient, the message should be realistic and keep from painting an excessively rosy picture.

In information and experience sharing, interaction and new social media, including Facebook and YouTube, will become more important.

Multipliers – teachers, tutors and youth workers – are key
Adults working with young people, such as teachers, trainers, tutors, youth workers and professionals in guidance and counselling are key actors in creating awareness and spreading information about possibilities offered by learning mobility. We should further strengthen information and guidance directed to these multipliers.

Good practices:
• Guidance and counselling on opportunities to study and work abroad are part of the national core curricula in Finnish primary and secondary schools.
• Information about mobility opportunities is part of the training events of Finnish vocational teachers.
• The Euroguidance network cooperates with Finnish universities and polytechnics to offer initial training for professionals in guidance and counselling.

European portals
According to the subsidiarity principle, information on learning mobility should primarily be a national responsibility. European portals (Ploteus, European Youth Portal) should be made more user-friendly. Unnecessary overlapping of different web services should be avoided.

Information efforts to match available funding
It is not meaningful to create false expectations with excessive information, if the financial resources do not allow increasing the number of mobile people. This is the present situation in Finland.
1.2 Promotion and motivation

What can be done to better promote and motivate young people to move? How should this be done to ensure maximum effect?

1. Learning mobility should become an integral part of day-to-day work and standard structures
If mobility is seen as a separate activity, it is easily felt as extra work, making it harder to motivate learners and multipliers. Learning mobility should therefore be gradually integrated as a formal part in the national and local school curricula, university degree programmes, and in the work plans of youth services.

Otherwise, it will be difficult to win widespread acceptance for learning mobility – or sufficient resourcing for full-scale mobility.

For example, internationalisation and mobility have been included in the new national core curricula for post-secondary VET in Finland (both in general skills for lifelong learning and in professional competences). This is an excellent example of presenting learning mobility in the right context. Similarly, there are plans to focus more on international/intercultural skills, when the national core curricula for primary and secondary schools are reformed in the near future. A good example from the world of higher education is the Hanken School of Economics in Helsinki, where every student incorporates a mobility period in his/her degree.

Promoting results, not only advertising funding
Instead of informing the target group of various grants, we should focus more on sharing information about the benefits of learning mobility and the experiences of those who have been mobile. For instance, youth initiatives in Finland are often repeated in localities where one group has successfully pioneered with one. Clearly the best way of creating enthusiasm and motivation is to have the youth to share their experiences with other young people!

Start early with learning mobility
Positive experiences of learning mobility at an early age lower the threshold for mobility later on. International cooperation already at the school level would significantly support mobility in future education and training, and also in non-formal learning, e.g. in youth work. This calls for the development of different forms of learning mobility suitable for the younger age groups – and for the provision of more funding for this target group. For instance, why not provide more virtual mobility in schools?

Motivation for multipliers and stakeholders
Teachers, tutors, trainers, guidance professionals and youth workers influence the attitudes and interests of young people. It is important to motivate these multipliers and
stakeholders in learning mobility through, for example, providing opportunities for their own mobility.

School management and municipalities make the final decision on matching funding for mobility actions. For example, during the current recession in Finland, we at CIMO have received information of several cases where municipal decision-makers have not allowed schools or youth services to participate in international cooperation. It is crucial to convince this group of the gains of learning mobility.

Finnish regional and sectoral networks of vocational training are a good example on how local actors such as chambers of commerce or businesses can be motivated into learning mobility. Similarly, in the province of Western Finland an internationalisation club (KV-klubi) has shown how to promote international youth work, resulting in international clubs at different locations.

**What do you see as the main barriers to the motivation of young people to become mobile?**

The younger generations are growingly aware of the environmental effects of travel. In future, the principles of sustainable development can become more important criteria when a young person considers whether to become mobile. The carbon footprint matters! Alternative ways of learning mobility, such as virtual mobility, should be creatively considered.

1.3 Languages and culture

**How can the linguistic and cultural obstacles to mobility be best addressed?**

Linguistic skills are important …
Language teaching is important in primary and secondary schools in particular, but it is still limited by the resources, mainly at the local level. In Finland, the challenge continues to be the dominance of the English language. Diversity in the choice of languages should be stressed to those who are making resourcing decisions in the municipalities.

Learning languages supports mobility, and mobility could be more systematically used in teaching languages!

… but linguistic skills should not be overemphasised
Attitude is key! It is possible to be successfully mobile also with modest language skills, by working in pairs, through group mobility, or by choosing an “easy” target country. On-the-job learning periods of VET students are a good example. Likewise the activities in non-formal learning (e.g. through the Youth in Action Programme) show that by working together and with adequate support, learning mobility can take place even with less advanced language skills.
Cultural preparation for outgoing people and their hosts is as important as linguistic preparation. Another important factor of a successful on-the-job period or placement is awareness of differences in professional cultures.

Much remains to be done in improving the quality of cultural preparation. Young people should learn to appreciate diversity and understand that there are other realities, not only the one they are familiar with.

Unutilised opportunity: Internationalisation at Home

Incoming young people could be used as a resource when teaching their language and culture to students of the host country. We should make better use of, and develop methods and methodologies for, Internationalisation at Home.

A case in point is the use of incoming Erasmus students as visitors in primary and secondary schools. In Finland, this will be funded through the “Management Partnership” initiative from 2010 onwards.

1.4 Legal issues

What are the main legal obstacles for mobility that you have encountered?

As a rule, there are no major obstacles in learning mobility between EU and EEA countries from the Finnish perspective. Still, problems persist with some special groups:

- People arriving to Finland for voluntary service (EVS action of the Youth in Action Programme) lack a clear status compared e.g. to those arriving for a placement linked to formal studies. As a result, taxation can vary from one municipality to another. Likewise the status of Comenius Assistants is not always clear.
- Obtaining a work permit can be problematic for a fresh graduate, who is no longer an undergraduate nor a postgraduate student.
- Furthermore, sometimes the decisions of regional authorities can differ in similar cases.

There are more challenges outside Europe or Schengen countries. For example, getting a visa can take a long time and residence permits can be expensive. A good working solution has been the cooperation between different authorities. For instance, CIMO sends information on Comenius assistants arriving from Turkey both to the Finnish embassy in Turkey and to the Immigration office in Finland. This speeds up the permit process.

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1.5 Portability of Grants and Loans

What kind of obstacles have you encountered regarding the portability of grants and loans and access to benefits?

Young people studying in Finland have a full portability of their grants and loans.

In cases of unemployment, there are still challenges. A Finn can make use of a working life period with a Finnish employer without losing unemployment benefits. However, the unemployment status and benefits can be lost if he/she heads abroad for a similar period or for voluntary service. Negotiations with the respective authorities have yet to yield results.

1.6 Mobility to and from the European Union

What more should be done to promote mobility to and from the European Union? How should this be done?

Away from Europe-centred thinking
The Green Paper seems to be focused on Europe while most challenges are global. Young people have widely grown to think globally and to regard themselves more as global citizens than Europeans. In the Bologna process, as well as in the Youth in Action Programme, these questions have been discussed for a long time. This approach should be reflected more widely also in learning mobility. A step in the right direction was the decision to enable participation of third-country citizens staying in an EU country in the Lifelong Learning Programme.

“Money makes the world go round”
The amount of mobility to and from EU correlates fully with the funding available. If more funding were directed to the mobility between Europe and the rest of the world, solutions to practical problems would follow suit. At the moment the Lifelong Learning Programme does not fund mobility with non-European countries. In the Youth in Action Programme this does happen, but more money is needed to enable broader participation. Better coordination of funding from different EU budgetary lines would be welcome.

An important prerequisite for learning mobility is knowing your partners. In addition to mobility actions themselves, other forms of cooperation projects are needed to establish cooperation networks with the world outside Europe, similar to those which already exist within Europe. Without reliable partners it will be difficult to start a broader and more permanent learning mobility outside Europe.
1.7 Preparation of the mobility period and quality assurance issues

What measures can be taken that the mobility period is of high quality?

With increasing numbers of mobile people, the added value of a mobility period is not guaranteed, especially when competing for jobs. Quality becomes more important.

Mobility period connected to overall learning
In our reply to question 1.2 we emphasised that learning mobility should become an integral part of day-to-day work and standard structures. It would hence also become included in quality assurance practices, making different actors automatically pay more attention to the quality of the mobility period.

Updating the contents and methods of studies/learning to meet the expectations and needs created by increased learning mobility should be emphasised more than in the Green Paper where it was referred to only in passing. This concerns the contents and methods of learning both in the sending and hosting countries. For instance, there should be wider and more varied opportunities to learn in a foreign language.

Planning and agreements
Mobility periods should be covered by clear agreements, describing the goals of the period and its role in the overall learning. One such good practice is the Quality Commitment in the Leonardo da Vinci programme that describes the responsibilities and duties of different actors: sending organisation – student – intermediary organisation – employer.

Another good practice is to require adequate reporting of the mobility period. This helps the mobile person to focus on the right issues and gives feedback for future mobility. Similarly, we could ascertain that all organisations applying for mobility periods meet certain quality criteria. For instance, the Helsinki Culinary School certifies all its cooperation partners beforehand and thus gets a guarantee of their quality.

Preparation of participants
In addition to language and cultural preparation, it is important to give preparation also in professional and pedagogical areas and working cultures of the host country when dealing with on-the-job learning/placements/voluntary service. For details, see 1.3 above.

Good examples of functioning practices include pre-departure training for outgoing students in Finnish universities or for young volunteers in the Youth in Action Programme.

Learning from previous mobilities
A good practice of preparatory activities is to make use of the people who have already been mobile. Blogs on mobility experiences could be provided via Internet, as now
happens in www.maailmalle.net. Similarly those who are planning their mobility period could have their questions answered in real time by those who have already been abroad or are presently mobile!

1.8 Reaching out to Disadvantaged Groups

Which are the most important difficulties encountered by disadvantaged groups with regard to learning mobility.

Different groups have varying needs
Disadvantaged people belong to many different special groups. It is necessary to define these different groups in order to find appropriate solutions to support their mobility.

Ideas for further development
At present additional financial support is available for those with special needs. However, the practical arrangements (access to classrooms with a wheelchair, interpretation of sign language, and so on) are left to the outgoing person to organise with the host. Is it possible to provide support through linking the outgoing person with respective special groups and their organisations in the host country? Internet and modern technology could be used in creating these contacts before the mobility period.

A good practice is to use disadvantaged persons with good experiences of mobility to talk to other young people in similar groups. Another good practice is to integrate a disadvantaged person into a group of mainstream learners.

A Finnish Youth in Action innovation, deserving wider attention, is the use of “cultural coaches” where people with a same cultural background are used in informing, coaching and supporting young people with fewer opportunities.

Special attention to modest learners
At the moment those who are doing well in their studies/learning are selected for mobility periods. However, mobility would also benefit those who are doing less well, giving them new motivation to learn. These individuals should be taken into consideration when selecting outgoing people. There are plenty of good examples in the Youth in Action Programme in particular, which gives special attention to the mobility of youth in weaker positions.
2. THE STAY ABROAD AND FOLLOW-UP

2.1 Mentoring and integration

Could you give some examples of good practice in this area?

Benefits both the mobile person and the host country
A mobility period is less beneficial if the young people socialise only among their countrymen or other foreigners. This challenge grows with increasing numbers of mobile persons. It should be noted that integration benefits not only the mobile person him/herself, but also the host country through opportunities for Internationalisation at Home \(^3\). Integration should be seen as a win-win situation.

Examples of good practice:
- Nomination of tutors at the receiving end;
- Using those who have been mobile as mentors/tutors for incoming young people;
- Organised meetings during the stay give the participants an opportunity to reflect their experiences;
- In Finland, young people who have been abroad through voluntary service participate in the orientation of the incoming volunteers and in the mid-term evaluation meetings during their stay. This has proven very successful;
- Activities, including social programme, for students coming for a placement period to Finland;
- Activities of the Erasmus Student Network;
- Use of own teacher/trainer in remote tutoring through Internet and Skype;
- Producing short and clear guides on different countries, their culture, studying and working abroad. For example, CIMO has published country guides available at http://www.cimo.fi/Resource.phx/cimo/maaoppaat.htx;
- Projects funded by the Leonardo programme have produced guides about on-the-job learning in different countries and vocations. See, for example, http://hesotenet.edu.hel.fi/english/etm2/.

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2.2 Recognition and Validation

In your experience, is the validation and recognition of both formal and non-formal learning still a significant obstacle to mobility?

Positive progress in validation and recognition of formal learning …
The development of common European tools is commendable and creates shared practices. ECTS, Europass, and ECVET will all contribute to validation and recognition in the long run. EQF will improve the transparency of qualifications and competences.

At the moment, individual agreements on recognition are made between learning institutions, learners and employers, and they can vary a lot. Further development and wider implementation of common European tools should therefore be promoted in order to further harmonise practices in recognition and validation.

…but we are still in square one with non-formal learning
ECTS, ECVET, Europass and individual mobility agreements mainly describe formal learning, useful for counting credits and such like. Recognition and documentation of non-formal learning (social skills, cultural understanding, self-confidence, etc.) are still underdeveloped. One positive opening is the Youthpass system of the Youth in Action Programme. Special attention should be paid to integrating Youthpass already in the planning and implementation phases of learning mobility, not only to using it as an ex-post documentation tool.

Return and life after a mobility period – unaddressed challenge
It is noticeable that the Green Paper does not touch on activities following the mobility period. This angle has also been missing in the public discussion. However, all who have stayed abroad for a longer period of time know that it is not always easy to return to the home country and to find use for the new skills that may not even be recognised by the people at home. Literature knows this phenomenon as the reverse culture shock.

The returnees cannot often see the value of what they have learnt and experienced and can be shy in telling about the development of their competences. This has been observed in job interviews, for example, where the applicants have not been able to describe the benefits of mobility. Likewise, the employers do not necessarily understand the benefits brought by mobility.

The follow-up of the mobility period should be addressed in the same way as the preparation of mobility. This would help the young person to process his/her learning experiences and use them later in life. The return should be seen as an integral part of mobility.

The return could be facilitated by several small practicalities, such as:
- Providing guidelines on issues related to the return;
• Joint meetings and contacts after the period. A good example is the so-called meeting of the returnees in the Youth in Action Programme, which is used to share experiences and discuss changes in life brought by the mobility;
• Alumni activities;
• Continued contact to the host country after return through means of virtual mobility (email, Skype, Facebook etc.).

3. A NEW PARTNERSHIP FOR MOBILITY

3.1 MOBILISING ACTORS AND RESOURCES

*How can all actors and resources at national, regional and local levels be better mobilised in the interest of youth mobility?*

Learning mobility should become an integral part of day-to-day work and standard structures
Learning mobility should gradually be included as a formal part in the national and local school curricula, in the university degree programmes, and in the work plans of youth services. Otherwise, it will be difficult to win widespread acceptance for learning mobility – or national, regional or local resourcing needed for a full-scale learning mobility.

National, regional and local strategies for internationalisation and mobility support learning mobility and its resourcing. Strategies alone are not enough, however. The challenge remains to ascertain the implementation of strategies and the funding needed. Otherwise the strategies do not reach the people.

National and local funding depends on financial fluctuations
National funding is used in Finland to supplement community funding in Erasmus, Grundtvig and Comenius programmes. In addition, there are separate budgetary lines to supporting international activities in general education, vocational education and training, and in higher education. The current economic situation does not allow for increasing this funding.

Learning mobility is also financed by the institutions themselves to varying degrees in the various institutions. In schools and youth work, the funding of mobility depends on municipal finances, which have suffered severely during the recession in Finland. As a result, some municipalities have deliberately forbidden sending staff or young people abroad.

European Union action programmes should have a key role also in future
A key issue in European mobility is that all countries have equal opportunities in participation. EU action programmes should therefore be central when increasing numbers of mobile people and making learning mobility a rule, not an exception.
National and local funding will always depend on the overall economy and vary by country and region. The same challenge applies to the Social Fund, with an uneven distribution of funding across countries.

European Union action programmes guarantee the same procedures and rules and thereby the equal treatment of citizens in all countries and regions. Adequate resourcing of EU programmes as part of the overall Community budget should therefore be guaranteed.

Can you provide good examples and innovative ideas on the funding of youth mobility?

The Nordplus framework programme of the Nordic Council of Ministers supports mobility, cooperation projects and networks, covering education and training from pre-primary schools to higher education. Originally a Nordic programme, it has been extended also to encompass the Baltic countries of Estonia, Latvia and Lithuania.

A smaller-scale example is the European School Network (www.esnetwork.eu), the result of a Comenius project. The network has created clear structures for small-scale mobility between schools, mainly financed with own funding. This shows that own funding is available if the cooperation is well structured.

3.2 More active involvement from the business world

How can businesses be motivated more strongly in youth mobility?

Placements through the Erasmus and Leonardo da Vinci programmes have increased the participation of businesses in mobility actions. However, it is still difficult for the students looking for and employers offering placements to connect. A European web-based service is needed for employers to offer places for students. Some models have been cited in the Green Paper, but these activities have been local or otherwise limited in scope. One possibility would be to use the EURES portal for this purpose.

Some good models in activating businesses:

- A spokesperson is selected from local business associations who as an example employs an international trainee and commits him/herself to share information in wider circles.
- Cooperation with chambers of commerce and youth chambers: these often select an annual theme, which they implement in their own projects throughout the year.
- National and regional social partners have an important role in informing their members. Early on in Finland’s EU membership, social partners distributed a lot of information on benefits of international placements. However, this has become less common since, even though the need is there.
3.3 Virtual Networking and eTwinning

*How can we best make use of ICTs to provide valuable virtual mobility opportunities to enrich the physical mobility? Can the eTwinning approach be used in other learning sectors, e.g. voluntary service, vocational sector?*

Virtual mobility should be utilised more …

There are several ways of using virtual mobility to support physical mobility. It is a great way of giving school pupils a first touch with the international world, and it can be used in preparation for a mobility period (see 1.7) or in communication after the return (see 2.2.).

Virtual mobility provides for opportunities to acquire international skills at home. In addition to ICT-based virtual mobility, other ways of Internationalisation at Home should be highlighted and encouraged. Visiting teachers or youth workers naturally promote Internationalisation at Home, but in future there should be more systematic use of incoming foreign students/young people. See also 2.1 above.

**Pedagogical solutions for virtual mobility needed**

eTwinning has been found as an especially good model in schools, where the number of potential movers is large, but the available resources are limited. The eTwinning concept could be further developed in order to expand its use to other target groups.

In addition to eTwinning, new technologies enable new, cost-effective means of communication, including Skype, Facebook and YouTube. Methodologies based on these new technologies should be worked on innovatively.

So-called project learning is an excellent way to utilise virtual mobility in teaching. For example, the students of car engineering can take part in an exercise where a BMW car in Slovenia has problems in ignition. This challenge is being tackled between student groups in three to four countries by using Skype and Internet-based working platforms. The assignment corresponds to genuine working life situations. This teaching methodology has been applied in Helsinki Metropolia Polytechnic for almost 10 years and now also in post-secondary vocational training (e.g. [http://plime.pkky.fi/](http://plime.pkky.fi/)). The development of this type of pedagogical models supports the use of virtual mobility.
3.4 Engaging the “multipliers”

Should mobility opportunities for “multipliers” (teachers, trainers, youth workers, etc.) be given additional support and prominence in European programmes?

Teachers are strong opinion leaders in the lives of millions of young people. Their positive attitudes on learning mobility also encourage the participation of pupils and students. Likewise the personal experience of youth workers on international cooperation helps them to motivate young people to acquire intercultural skills. The mobility of multipliers should be significantly increased, but it is even more important to widen the base for participation, i.e. to involve other actors such as vocational teachers and trainers, or guidance professionals. Also, the mobility should become more diverse. For instance, teachers in primary and secondary schools cannot currently take part for a longer period.

Further, the training of teachers and guidance professionals should increase their awareness of international cooperation and mobility. They should also be able to participate in mobility during their own degree.

What do you see as the main obstacles to a stronger engagement of teachers and trainers in promoting mobility?

The costs of hiring a substitute for a teacher/trainer/youth worker leaving for a mobility period are currently not covered by EU funding. This is the single greatest obstacle to mobility in primary and secondary schools, VET institutions and youth services, where the hiring of substitutes is paid from municipal budgets. These have been adversely affected by the current economic recession.

3.5 Mobility targets

Do you consider targets a useful tool in defining a mobility strategy and if so, at what level (European, national, institutional, sectoral, etc.)?

Please provide examples of good practice

Evidence-based policy needed
In order to increase mobility it is important to ensure that there is sufficient information on the mobility of different target groups. This is how we can give adequate attention to the challenges and problems, which may vary significantly from one target group and country to another. For instance, CIMO is responsible for the statistics on mobility in higher education and vocational education and training in Finland. The statistics cover all incoming and outgoing mobility, not only EU programmes, and as such they are a good basis for decision making. However, there are no all-inclusive statistics on mobility in schools.
Targets need to be matched with funding
Targets alone are not sufficient. There needs to be a funding plan associated with them. The Lifelong Learning Programme is an unfortunate example. Because of overambitious mobility targets, other activities have to be cut, even though they are needed to support mobility.

Also, in the Youth in Action Programme, the allocation of funds between different actions has decreased the number of mobile youth compared to the previous Youth programme.

Money sets the targets!
The number of mobile people correlates directly with funding available. For example, the mobility of young people in vocational education and training in Finland could be easily doubled, if there were enough resources. Similarly, in schools the mobility figures could be multiplied. Ensuring sufficient resourcing to different target groups is a central challenge for the new programme period from 2014 onwards. Learning mobility should be ensured to young people in all target groups. This is crucial for the success of the European project at large.