



INDIVIDUAL PUPIL MOBILITY PROJECT

FINAL REPORT

(submitted 10/10/2008)

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1. Introduction

In preparation of an individual pupil mobility scheme under the new Lifelong Learning Programme (Comenius Sub-programme), the European Commission has awarded a Service Contract (n° 2006-2867/001-001) for a long-term project to EFIL, the European Federation for Intercultural Learning, the umbrella organisation of the European AFS-Organisations. The new programme will enable secondary school pupils to spend up to a year studying in a school abroad with a grant from the European Commission. EFIL has hired EEE-YFU (European Educational Exchanges – Youth for Understanding) as a subcontractor.

The project consisted of three consecutive parts: (1) an analysis of the context in 31 European countries, (2) drafting of recommendations on the practical implementation of the action, and (3) a pilot phase with intra-European exchanges of up to 500 secondary school pupils. The results of this pilot project will be taken into account when designing the practical implementation of the new action.

This Final Report is the fifth report to the European Commission, following the “Initial Report”, the “First Interim Report”, the “Second Interim Report” and the “Third Interim Report” that were submitted during different phases of this project. Throughout the text of this Final Report, reference is made to these extensive documents.

The Final Report presents an overview of the different aspects of this pilot project, with a focus on the results of the exchange phase itself and the evaluation of this mobility scheme by an external evaluator:

2. Executive summary

In preparation of a new strand of the COMENIUS action of the EU Lifelong Learning Programme, a pilot project has been carried out which is intended to assist the European Commission and its National Agencies in the design of the practical implementation of educational mobility of individual pupils among schools involved in COMENIUS partnerships.

This summary intends to capture the main findings of our research, the evaluation of the pilot exchange and our recommendations for the future implementation of individual mobility opportunities within the COMENIUS action.

2.1 Introduction

The European Commission has, over the last few years, recognized an increased demand for individual pupil mobility. This was taken into account when drafting the proposal for a new Lifelong Learning Programme³ for the period 2007- 2013. In 2006, the European Commission launched a call for tenders to entrust the preparation of the new action to an external service provider.

The European Commission aims to ensure that the implementation of the new action is based on a thorough analysis of the context in which the mobility of pupils takes place. Lessons had to be learned from existing national or European programmes for similar mobility activities and the basic framework and minimum quality requirements for the action also needed to be developed and tested with a small pilot group of pupils.

The European Federation for Intercultural Learning (EFIL), the federation of European AFS organisations, won the bid for this tender. Together with EEE-YFU, the federation of European YFU organisations, as a subcontractor, EFIL carried out the implementation of this pilot project.

The pilot project consisted of three consecutive parts:

1. Study phase

EFIL and EEE-YFU conducted an analysis of the context of educational mobility in 31 European countries (all 27 EU Member States + Norway, Iceland, Liechtenstein and Turkey), the existing mobility programmes and any evaluations made thereof; legal issues related to the mobility of minors; the recognition in different countries of study periods spent abroad and possible obstacles to pupil mobility. A National Coordinator was assigned to coordinate the study in each of the 31 countries respectively.

Target groups:

EFIL and EEE-YFU ensured that the same target group of respondents was identified in each country. Four main categories of relevant actors or key players in school education and in the field of mobility were the targets for the study.

- Relevant actors in the formal education sector: public administrations at national, regional and/or local level dealing with formal education and/or trans-national pupil

- mobility (Ministries of Education, Boards of Education, City Councils, National Agencies managing Socrates/Comenius);
- Schools that had already taken part in mobility schemes, as a sending or hosting institution. Among them were public and private schools, as well as academic and technical schools.
 - Profit and non-profit mobility providers;
 - Associations of relevance: a parent association, a pupil association, a head teacher association.

Methodology:

Several questionnaires were used (containing multiple choice questions as well as open ended questions), together with qualitative interviews and meetings (telephone and face-to-face), document analysis and internet search.

- Relevant actors in the formal education sector: (document analysis + interviews)

Through research, analysis of documents and interviews with relevant actors, the National Coordinators collected information needed for an overview of the context in their country regarding individual pupil mobility. The National Coordinator set up one or several meeting(s)/interview(s) with the relevant actors in the school education sector:

- office or department responsible for secondary school mobility programmes (national level or federal/regional level if applicable).
 - office or department responsible for the international dimension of school education (national level or federal/regional level if applicable).
 - National Agencies.
- Profit and non-profit Mobility Providers: questionnaire

National Coordinators were asked to target as many Mobility Providers as possible, which have operated long term mobility schemes (three months or more). This includes AFS and YFU organisations. Questionnaires were distributed (after translation, if needed). An overview/compilation of all questionnaires returned, was presented in the 'Country Report Mobility Providers' by the National Coordinators.

70 Mobility providers of study abroad programmes answered the questionnaire.

- Schools: questionnaire

In order to obtain relevant information, only schools with experience in long term individual pupil mobility were contacted. It was recommended to include different types of schools: public and private, vocational (technical) and general, etc.

As the aim of the survey was not to collect statistics on mobility, there was no need to include a large sample of schools or to cover the country completely by including all possible regions. National Coordinators were asked to target specific schools that could provide useful information. EFIL received a response from 324 schools in the 31 countries.

- Associations of relevance: (questionnaire + interviews)

Representatives from the European Secondary Heads Association (ESHA), the European Parents Association (EPA) and the Organising Bureau of Secondary School Student Unions (OBESSU) were interviewed and asked to fill in a questionnaire.

2. Recommendation phase

On the basis of the findings of the study, a proposal for a mobility framework was drafted, including recommendations on administration and management of the scheme, minimum requirements and core content of necessary trainings for pupils, host schools and host families, support structure for pupils, etc.

3. Mobility phase

Only schools and pupils that complied with all of the agreed eligibility criteria were allowed to participate in the mobility phase.

Eligible institutions:

- (1) had received a grant for a Comenius School Partnership (School Project, School Development Project or Language Project) in 2004, 2005 and/or 2006; and
- (2) were located in one of the 10 qualifying countries: Austria, Belgium, Denmark, Estonia, Finland, France, Germany, Hungary, Italy, Portugal; and
- (3) had a Comenius partner school in one of these countries.

Eligible pupils:

- (1) were aged between 14 and 18 years old; and
- (2) were nationals or permanent residents of one of the 10 eligible countries.

The European Commission and EFIL had planned to run the mobility scheme with 300-500 pupils. After selection and preparation, altogether 294 pupils started their 3 or 6 month exchange experience in August/September 2007. Coordination was taken care of by national AFS organisations in all countries involved, except for Estonia where the local YFU office handled the coordination of the project. In Germany AFS and YFU each dealt with a part of the programme. The same was true for the two Belgian AFS organisations, respectively covering the Flemish and the French speaking part of Belgium. Overall coordination of the mobility phase was in the hands of EFIL.

2.2 The general legislative framework for educational mobility in Europe

Our survey covered the 31 LLP countries and was concluded in June 2007. It focused on the possibility not only to pursue one's schooling for a limited period of time in another country, but also to receive proper accreditation for it. Other measures that may further educational mobility or, on the contrary, hinder it, were also explored.

2.2.1 For outgoing pupils

Allowing an interruption of their schooling

Very few restrictions exist on the interruption of a school year. None of the governments of the 31 European countries that have been studied prohibits the interruption of a school year. In

several countries, the schools decide on this independently and, in general, favourably.

In most countries, no particular legal framework applies to the exchange of pupils which implies that instead the general educational regulatory framework applies. The latter Framework confers a certain degree of autonomy to the schools. They are also often mute on the particularity of temporary studies abroad, which means that in most countries it would again be the schools that decide about individual cases. A majority of them pose no conditions at all for mobility to take place and those that do, do so for academic reasons, making sure that the pupils catch up all their course work.

Several governments encourage their pupil's successful mobility periods not only academically, but also through fiscal measures. This is the case for Norway, Sweden, Denmark and the Land of Hamburg (Germany).

Recognising academic achievements acquired abroad

Specific legislation dealing with the certification of studies taken abroad has been developed fairly recently. The earliest legislative initiative dates from 1994 (Italy) and the most recent from 2006, with plans to develop one in Latvia in 2007-2008. The Scandinavian countries lead the example in promoting exchanges through positive national policies.

Austria, Hungary and Italy are the only three countries that address the unique situation of both pupils returning from study abroad programmes and foreign pupils temporarily studying in their countries.

Only Dutch, Irish and UK pupils are denied the opportunity to have their studies abroad recognised. All other countries either recognise them by law or have practical provisions that will allow pupils to obtain equivalencies.

Austria, the German states, Hungary, Italy, Spain and Turkey have passed laws specifically addressing the recognition of exchange periods undertaken by their resident pupils during their normal schooling at home. Bilateral agreements on recognition of studies undertaken within certain programmes, such as the one between France and Germany or multilateral ones, such as the Nordic Agreement on Pupil Mobility are not very common.

In some countries there is no legislation in the pipeline because there has been no practice or need for it (for example Liechtenstein, Lithuania and Cyprus). Study periods abroad may also be recognised even in the absence of proper legislation. Whether regulatory conditions exist or not, most pupils need to prove their ability to integrate their academic level back home and make appropriate arrangements with his/her home school before embarking on an exchange.

Mobility in practice

Aside from intangible and practical aspects such as the importance of the last year of studies, the incompatibility of the curriculum between the sending and the hosting school is seen as one of the main obstacles to proper recognition. This is followed by the legal vacuum on matters of recognition.

2.2.2 For incoming pupils

Allowing foreign pupils to attend schools at home

All countries welcome foreign pupils into their schools. In the majority of cases, the schools decide in accordance with the laws set by the state or regional authorities. In the absence of a special regulatory set-up, the Danish, Slovak, Slovenian and Swedish schools decide themselves on the admission of foreign pupils. Technically, exchange pupils may attend any grade in virtually all European countries, but schools usually orient the pupils according to age and course load.

While all countries welcome foreign pupils into their schools, they are also concerned about safeguarding their borders and about protecting young people under the age of 18. In terms of visas and residence permits, the requirements are minimal for pupils from the EU or Schengen countries. For citizens from other countries wishing to spend more than 3 months in a country, visas and/or residence permits are mandatory. Most pupils undertaking study abroad programmes during their secondary schooling are minors and fall under special legal protection.

Recognition of academic achievements acquired by foreign pupils during an exchange

While theoretically possible in 18 out of 31 countries, obtaining a proper diploma remains difficult. There are several reasons that explain this:

- some countries only deliver a proper diploma to pupils who have attended the entire schooling period in the country or a certain number of classes teaching the national language;
- some countries require a proficiency in a particular curricula (for example the national language or in literature), that is virtually impossible to pass;
- in some countries, the certification process for the final diploma takes place over more than two semesters, making it impossible for exchange students to obtain it;
- often, pupils are not placed in the grades that would allow them to pass the final exams.

Europass remains the best “informal” option to record study periods abroad, but to date has been used very little outside the official EU mobility programmes.

2.2.3 The protection of minors

The legal age of majority in all European countries surveyed is 18. Exchange pupils are minors when they embark on an exchange programme and fall under the legal protection of acts protecting minors (which includes children – generally under 14 - and young people – 14 to 18).

The protection afforded to minors will often deal with a number of aspects such as media access, media use, protection against sexual misconduct and prohibitions (access to pubs, gambling houses, etc. after certain hours). In some countries a distinction is made between nationals and foreign minors.

The age at which a young person may be prosecuted for crimes can be as young as 10, but in most European countries there is a distinction between children and juveniles and the minimum age tends to be 14/15. Special prosecution rules, courts, corrective measures (for example of an educational nature) or custody rules apply in most cases.

2.3 Educational mobility in Europe – the experience of the schools

Schools organising their own mobility do so for programmes of a very short duration (up to 3 weeks) and it appears that schools work principally on a bilateral level basis and very much within school partnerships. While school reciprocity is encouraged in these exchanges, only a number of the exchanges actually are reciprocal in nature. In terms of risk management, only a limited number of the schools take out special insurance (typically this would be health insurance). In general, but particularly when it comes to longer educational mobility, the schools rely primarily on intermediary organisations. According to the respondents, the major advantage provided by private associations organising pupil exchanges is the know-how and the expertise in the preparatory and support phases of the exchange.

On the subject of **collaboration between schools involved in exchanges**, all schools would welcome a more intense exchange of information between the sending and the hosting school on the school system itself, the grading system and the foreign pupil's course programme at home. More than a third would also welcome regular contacts between the schools *during* the exchange.

For outgoing pupils, most schools encourage study abroad programmes and the majority of them do not consider a study abroad programme as presenting any type of difficulty, except perhaps when it comes to the difference in curricula. Less than 30% of the respondents feel that pupils having studied abroad face particular challenges in their re-integration, which focus primarily on the need to catch up with part of the curricula with the help of teachers.

For incoming pupils, the hosting schools judge both the lack of proficiency in the language and the different levels of knowledge in specific subject matters as the major obstacles in the integration of the foreign pupil into the school. Schools often develop their own mentoring systems to help in the hosted pupil's integration.

As has been the case with the pilot exchange, our earlier survey also found that the extra investment required by the teachers to deal with educational mobility projects is mentioned consistently as one of the **difficulties of educational mobility**. Whether dealing with outgoing pupils, pupils being hosted, or even pupils returning from an exchange, teachers are inevitably drawn into the practical mastering of the challenges associated with an exchange. This appears to be a direct consequence of the difference in curricula between the sending and the hosting school, the problem of accreditation of courses taken abroad and, in general, the absence of a dedicated structure within the school to deal with the general co-ordination of educational mobility.

2.4 Educational mobility in Europe – the experience of specialised mobility providers

Overall, the 70 respondents in our survey receive an average of over 11,000 applications for educational exchanges on a yearly basis and the volume of exchanges is growing. On average, between 80-90% of the applicants are accepted. Their primary target group is between 16 and 17 years old and enrolled in secondary education.

Currently, mobility providers adhere to a quality charter of their own. At the end of 2006, the

European Commission introduced the European Quality Charter for Mobility.

AFS and YFU are the mobility providers with the largest hosting programme for full academic programmes. The next largest hosting organisation is SILC (Séjours Internationaux Linguistiques et Culturels), a French-based organisation.

Specialised mobility providers offer a number of services according to their own quality charter. Support to pupils, families and schools during the exchange are the major part of the mobility provider's tasks: aside from assuming the risks associated with the exchange of minors, all of them offer ongoing mentoring support and structured training opportunities to outgoing and incoming pupils, families and, although less frequently, schools at different times during the lifecycle of the programme. The most important support is the 24/7 access to a knowledgeable support system that can deal with unforeseen difficulties or emergencies. Logistical support (arrangement of visas or permits of stay, airport welcome, transport to the hosting community, liaising with the insurance company etc.), intercultural learning support (ad-hoc support in conflict situations, addressing intercultural learning issues during trainings and preparatory camps) are all part of the typical services provided by mobility providers.

Specialised mobility providers propose specific (and predominantly mandatory) insurance. As with the schools, health and third-party liability are the two most popular types of coverage.

The types of programmes offered by specialised mobility providers are primarily yearlong, multilateral study programmes. Interestingly, almost 30% of the respondents offer their programmes exclusively to the pupils residing in their country (study abroad programmes) but no hosting programmes for families at home.

Semester exchanges are the second most popular type of programme. Here the private leader is “En Famille International”, a French-based organisation, followed by AFS and SILC. The French and German government also offer a semester programme called VOLTAIRE. It targets German and French pupils, aged 15-16, attending grades 9 and 10 and is based on reciprocity.

Hosting of trimester exchanges is almost exclusively offered by AFS and German government agencies. While the AFS programmes take place among several European countries, the German government-sponsored programmes all take place between Germany and a variety of other countries.

Shorter programmes are primarily the specialty of government agencies, in particular in Germany where large numbers of them take place each year (10.000 on average, counting both semester and trimester programmes).

According to the mobility providers, **the most popular European destinations are**, by order of preference: Germany, France Italy, Belgium and Austria. German, French, Belgian, Hungarian and Italian pupils were hosted most. The popularity of Franco-German exchanges can in part be explained by the exchanges organised under the auspices of the Franco-German Youth Exchanges.

2.5 Educational mobility in Europe - the view of other stakeholders of the school community

The European Secondary Heads Association (ESHA), the European Parents Association (EPA) and the Organising Bureau of Secondary School Student Unions (OBESSU) all support the proposed action despite the fact that each federation foresees slightly different objectives for the programme. While ESHA focuses on the 'European idea', European citizenship and the pupil's development, EPA underlines the learning of foreign languages and the cultural experience as the main added value for pupils. ESHA, while acknowledging the benefits of year-long exchanges also sees clear academic benefits to exchanges lasting three months. OBESSU expresses concerns, referring to the budget cutbacks in the Lifelong Learning Programme and the reduced budget for student mobility, which is contradictory to the Parliament's and the Commission's claim for a better investment in youth.

2.6 Educational Mobility in Europe – financial aspects

The individual mobility of pupils is primarily financed through private means. While several governments encourage this type of mobility, notably through government grants made available to pupils who undertake successful studies abroad, the bulk of public financing goes to short-term exchanges (up to 3 weeks).

Non-for-profit mobility providers often grant scholarships based on socio-economic criteria or to specifically promote young people from a certain ethnic, gender or socio-economic background. Several foundations actively support pupil exchanges through grants. The largest foundation supporting pupil mobility is the Rotary Foundation.

2.7 Educational mobility in Europe – existing research and statistics

2.7.1 Statistics

There are no public or official statistics for individual pupil mobility maintained by any of the countries evaluated, except when they are related to a government programme. In countries that promote mobility through grants, as is the case in Denmark and Norway, statistics are being maintained by the organisations or institutions administering the grants.

2.7.2 Research

The largest amount of literature on the subject of individual pupil mobility can be found in Germany, where a great number of exchange opportunities for secondary school pupils exist. The limited body of research that does exist on the impact of educational exchanges and the barriers that still exist, has been undertaken by both international and national organisations, as well as by private organisations, such as AFS.

Benefits of exchanges

The most common findings out of the body of existing research of relevance to the COMENIUS

individual mobility programme, can be summarised as follows:

- the most effective actions of Socrates have been those that involved mobility;
- intercultural understanding is a catalyst in the process of language learning;
- preparations/orientations as well as an independent (neutral) mentoring system are a key success factor in exchanges;
- life and socialisation outside of school is the Achilles heel of successful exchanges;
- pupils returning from an exchange generally do better academically than they did before and then did their classmates;
- exchange students become multipliers in promoting respect for cultural diversity and tolerance – they seek out new intercultural contexts and civil/political commitments;
- according to the available literature on mobility (research, practitioners' handbooks etc.), there is no support for the assumption that academic achievements in itself is a valid criterion for participating in a long-term exchange.

Common obstacles to educational exchanges

By order of importance, mobility providers, schools, families and pupils commonly mention the following impediments to mobility:

- the costs of educational mobility, which become even more taxing when the study abroad programme is not recognised;
- the lack of recognition, mostly due to the incompatibility of the curricula;
- the opposition of teachers and head teachers, who are more interested in the grades and the quality of the teaching abroad, often judged of lesser value; this is also described as a clash between the learner-centred and the curriculum-centred approach;
- the lack of a legislative framework; although in practice some European pupils undertake successful study abroad programmes, the teachers and head teachers indicate that the existence of proper legislation would be an important step in increasing the volume of exchanges;
- the lack of information about the different mobility programmes and the possibility to evaluate and compare them according to established standards;
- the difficulty in obtaining visas and residence permits for pupils from certain countries.

2.8 The pilot exchange

As part of the preparations of a new strand of the COMENIUS action of the EU Lifelong Learning Programme, a pilot exchange (trimester or semester) with a maximum of 500 secondary school pupils was entrusted to the European Federation for Intercultural Learning (EFIL) and its Member Organisations (AFS) as well as 2 Member Organisations of European Educational Exchanges – Youth for Understanding, EEE-YFU. In the ensuing description of the pilot phase and its evaluation, the term "intermediary organisations" is used to denote AFS and YFU, the two specialised exchange organisations responsible for implementing the pilot project at national level in the following countries: Austria, Belgium (Flemish and French-speaking community), Denmark, Estonia, Finland, France, Germany, Hungary, Italy and Portugal.

The exchanges were fully funded by a grant from the European Commission. This grant covered the international travel, local transport to/from school, all school related costs and a monthly allowance. All pupils were provided medical coverage, by means of a group insurance.

2.8.1 The milestones of the pilot exchange

The preparatory phase

During the preparatory phase, the role of the participating agencies, specialised organisations and schools were laid down, taking into account the requirements imposed by the European Commission. The main requirement was that only a sending and hosting school involved in the same Comenius Partnership could exchange pupils.

In January 2007, with the help of the National Agencies, comprehensive information campaigns were organised in all participating countries. This campaign aimed to prepare potential schools for the new tasks associated with the pilot.

Application phase: pre-call and call for applicants

On February 15 2007, both an expression of interest and a formal application form were available to schools.

Out of the 670 having expressed an interest in joining the pilot scheme, 291 schools eventually completed the formal application on behalf of 658 pupils. 580 of these underwent the selection process, after which 341 eligible pupils remained. Between the selection and the actual departure, another 47 pupils dropped out or were forced to stay home because either their school pulled out of the pilot and/or the hosting school was unable to find host families.

Screening and selection of host families

While the primary responsibility for finding host families lay with the host schools, the intermediary organisations had to step in to help with the search for families after only 68% of the host families were found by the deadline of May 31st. The families were all visited and screened prior to the exchange.

Pre-departure training

The intermediary organisations offered pre-departure trainings for all outgoing pupils, focusing on the experience of an exchange, the challenges that may arise and how to deal with them. The trainings were articulated around workshops, role-plays, simulation exercises and offered contacts to pupils who had formerly been on an exchange themselves.

Host families were also given an opportunity to share their expectations and raise questions about the experience.

2.8.2. Other services in support of the pilot exchange

Travel co-ordination

The co-ordination of the travel was centrally agreed among the intermediary organisations so as to ensure common arrival dates and meeting points for all exchange pupils travelling to the same country.

Contractual arrangements and grant management

For the purpose of the pilot, all financial matters were dealt with between EFIL and the schools. The intermediary organisations carried the legal responsibility for the safety and well-being of the pupils. To that end, a contractual document was agreed between the parents of the pupil and AFS or YFU.

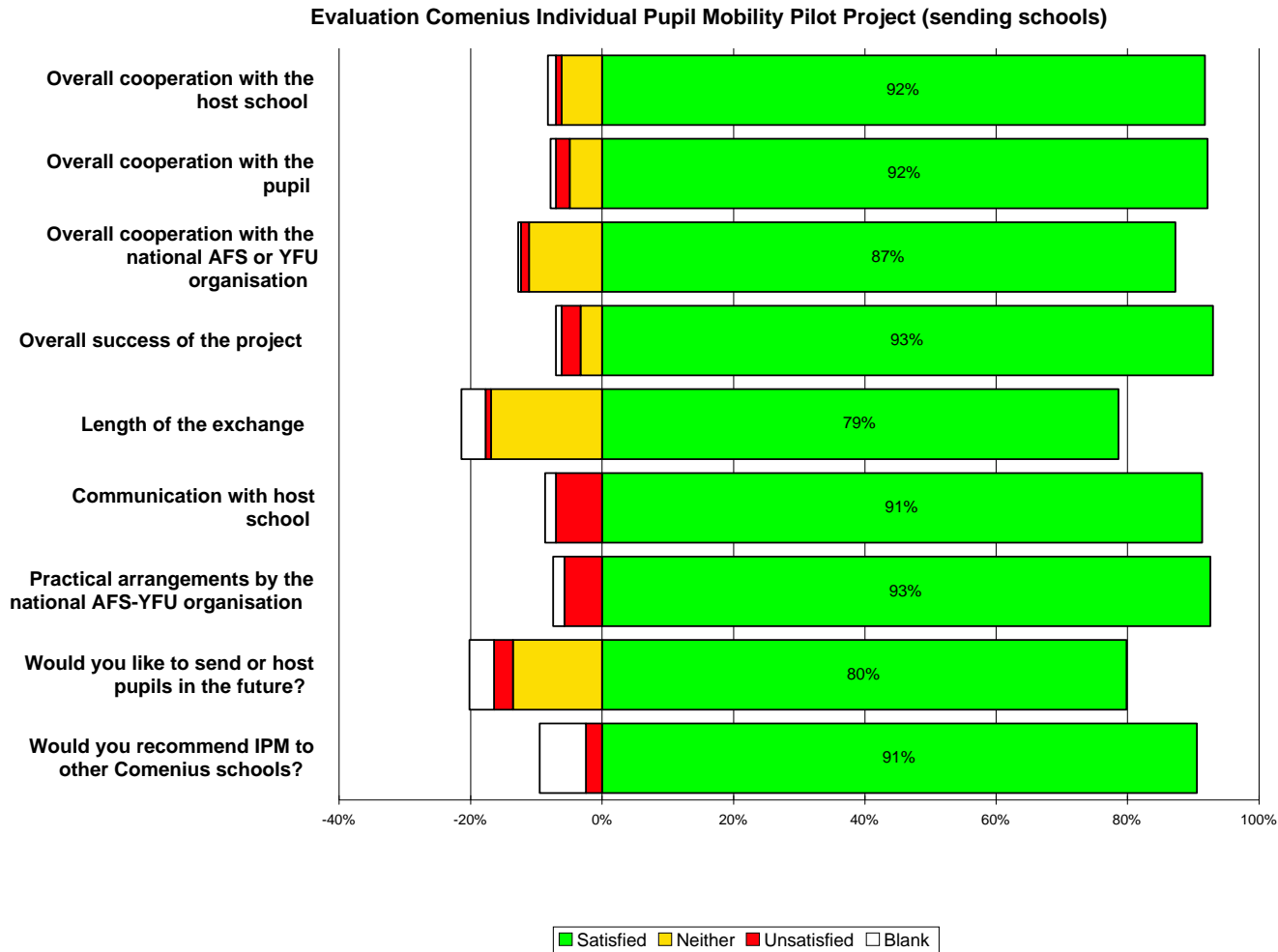
2.9 The evaluation of the pilot exchange

In order to formulate recommendations for the future individual mobility in the framework of the COMENIUS programme, evaluations of the test phase involving the exchange of 294 pupils between 10 European countries were conducted both by EFIL and an external expert, Dr. Søren Kristensen from Techne (Denmark). Both evaluations investigated a number of practical issues in relation to the exchange, notably accommodation, travel arrangements, grant management, insurance, liability, information flows, the support provided before, during and after the exchange, and pedagogical aspects in general.

EFIL's internal evaluation focused on operational aspects of the exchange in view of the **pupils** and the **sending schools**. Intermediary organisations constantly monitor the exchanges taking place and are well aware of issues and challenges outside of the formal evaluation conducted as part of this pilot exchange. However, the evaluation that follows was based on special questionnaires proposing both quantifiable and qualitative answers.

Dr. Kristensen's evaluation focused primarily on the exchange as a pedagogical tool and aimed at identifying factors that had a negative impact on learning outcomes (barriers) as well as positive factors (examples of good practice) and their potential *transferability*. Dr. Kristensen's evaluation is strictly *qualitative* and is based on the tasks undertaken by the main actors responsible for the quality of the exchange (intermediary organisations, sending and hosting schools) using a variety of methods (document analysis, participatory observation, questionnaire surveys and qualitative interviews).

2.9.1 Evaluation of the operational aspects of the pilot exchange

Evaluation by the schools

According to EFIL's evaluation, 92% of the schools rated the experience as good/very good, and showed interest in doing similar exchanges with other pupils in the future, even outside of the framework of COMENIUS. The same high percentage of positive appreciation was given both to the cooperation with their partner schools and pupils. As to the cooperation with intermediary organisations, 87% of the schools rated it as very good to good – high points were given for administrative support and assistance in finding host families. The external evaluation, which was conducted separately by Dr. Kristensen, concurs with the internal findings, both in terms of appreciation as well as recommendations for the future programme.

According to the external evaluation, the participating schools and pupils are clear in their appreciation of the outcome of the experience, especially in terms of the personal development of the pupils, ranging from personal development, self-confidence, self-reliance to new language skills. On an organisational level, the schools recognised a “Europeanisation” effect through a

better knowledge of other European cultures and a greater orientation towards other European countries, as opposed to the traditional “language” choice countries of the U.S. and the United Kingdom as prime exchange destinations. Asked if they would recommend COMENIUS individual pupil mobility to other schools, 91% of the schools responded positively, giving the following reasons:

- the value it posed for the pupils to learn about other countries and cultures;
- the value it posed in encouraging pupils to be more open-minded and tolerant;
- to sustain the relations with (former) COMENIUS partners and to give pupils a safe way to experience foreign cultures;
- to provide equal opportunities for pupils to go abroad regardless of the financial situation of their families.

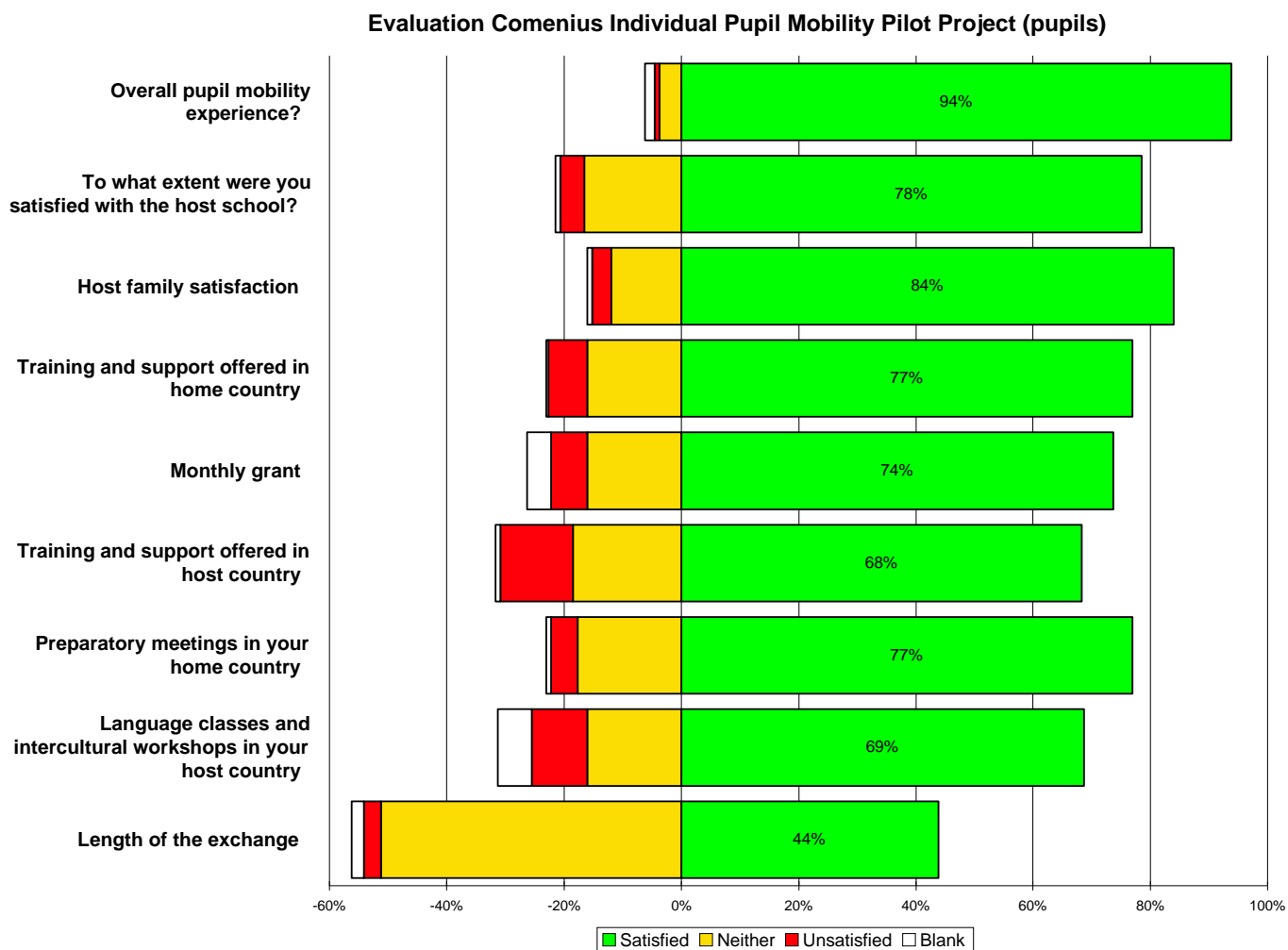
In relation to the academic aspects of the exchange, the host schools mentioned the following problems while acknowledging that the learning outcomes in other areas more than counterbalanced any lacunae in academic learning caused by these differences:

Academic challenges identified by schools	Recommendations by the schools
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> - difficulties with the grading system in foreign schools - differences in curriculum, where it became unclear which subjects the pupil could or had to follow to comply with the regulations in his/her home country - differences in teaching methods - in some cases, differences in age and academic levels - language difficulties 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> - an insight into different educational systems - an overall scheme for crediting grades in EU schools - an even more intense cooperation among schools

In relation to the operational aspects of the exchange, the schools mentioned the following issues:

Operational challenges identified by schools	Recommendations by the schools
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> - the short time-frame for recruitment - the additional workload for teachers with no appropriate compensation - the management of the grant (due in part to internal/national regulations) - finding host families 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> - a longer time-frame - lighter administrative procedures (including not having to deal with the financial side of the exchange)

Evaluation by the pupils



94% of the pupils were satisfied with the experience. In terms of personal development, the pupils mention the same personal gains as those mentioned by their schools (see above) and additionally: better self-knowledge, more maturity, more tolerance towards other people and cultures, greater openness, more patience and greater adaptability. .

In relation to the school, they articulated the following challenges:

Academic challenges identified by the pupils	Recommendations by the pupils
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> - agreeing on a common curriculum between the schools - time to acclimatize 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> - learning agreements made by both the sending and the hosting schools - a more flexible school time at the beginning to allow time for proper language learning

In relation to the host family, 84% of the pupils were satisfied. In relation to operational aspects, there were some practical problems with the payment of the monthly allowance due to incompatibilities with the financial regulations of the schools.

Adjustment and integration problems faced by pupils

Just over 7% of the pupils ended their exchange prematurely. This is a relatively high rate of failed exchanges, given the usual rate that intermediary organisations experience is roughly 3.5% and which includes returns due to illnesses and accidents rather than deficiencies in the selection process. The main reasons for these failed exchanges were categorised as follows:

- home sickness
- pressure from family to return home
- psychological problems of the pupil
- adjustment problems in the host family
- adjustment problems in general
- wrong expectations
- crisis situations

Dealing with actual crisis, as was the case in the above situations, was the responsibility of the intermediary organisations. The organisations blame the very short preparatory phase, leading to a poor selection process and a hasty recruitment of host families, as the main cause of such a high level of early returns. Another explanation may lie in the fact that a fully funded activity usually requires less of a personal commitment to the success of the experience on the part of the beneficiary.

2.9.2 Evaluation of the pedagogical quality assurance of the pilot exchange

The external evaluation was conducted exclusively by the expert, Dr. Søren Kristensen.

The criteria used by the external expert in his evaluation were derived from a theoretical framework which operationalises learning theory in a context of educational stays abroad. According to this framework, learning during transnational mobility does not take place automatically but is essentially a pedagogical activity that needs to be correspondingly underpinned and supported. Otherwise, the outcome may be no learning at all – or even worse – negative learning where the student returns with prejudices or a sense of failure. Factors that condition the cognitive and affective learning stipulate three learning conditions for transnational mobility projects:

1. *Immersion*: that participants must – to the highest degree possible - be surrounded by, and immersed in, culture and mentality of the host country;
2. *Responsibilisation*: that participants, in so far as possible, must cope themselves with the problems and challenges they encounter during the stay abroad;
3. *Perspectivation*: that participants must be given the time, space and support to reflect upon their experiences of diversity and disjuncture.

In order to bring this about, pedagogical interventions are not only called for *during* the stay abroad, but also *before* and *after*. The exchanges are therefore to be considered as systems involving activities before (recruitment/motivation, selection and preparation), during (monitoring, mentoring) and after (evaluation, recognition, perspectivation, retention and reintegration).

Evaluation of what took place before the exchange

- **The recruitment** (by the schools): it appears that because of the short time-frame available, the schools had very little time to implement a true recruitment strategy and so instead targeted one or two pupils with good academic standing. The recruitment guidelines offered by the intermediary organisations were not properly used. There is however little doubt that a suitable pool of motivated and able students can be recruited in the future programme.
- **The selection** (by the intermediary organisations): this crucial part of the exchange process, understandably complicated by the fact that an exchange could only take place between existing COMENIUS partner schools, was done with a fairly limited pool of candidates. The evaluator judged the selection criteria used in the pilot to be general and not operational – and therefore a skill that will prove more difficult to transfer to schools or agencies.
- **The preparation** (by the intermediary organisations): the participants judged the efficacy of the preparation positively and any problems that the schools may have encountered did not appear to be the fault of inappropriate or insufficient preparation. However, the majority of the (few) negative comments that are registered do not concern the actual content and length of the preparation, but rather the lack of contact and coordination between the sending school and the intermediary organisation. As part of the pedagogical preparation, the schools and the intermediary organisations should have collaborated more closely given that they both pursue complementary learning objectives, even though they differ in aims and methods.

Evaluations of what took place during the stay abroad

- **The monitoring** (by the intermediary organisations) was judged to be well done. There is evidence that potential problems were defused very early on or never developed and the intervention in one major crisis ended well. One of the key points here is that monitoring was available 24/7 and was executed by counsellors belonging to an outside organisation.
- **The mentoring** (by the host schools): this task was judged as heavy by many of the appointed mentors, also because the administrative issues in connection with the exchange and the finding of the host family was also entrusted to the appointed mentor. The organisation of the exchanges and the work involved is apparently seen by many schools as a voluntary activity to be undertaken outside of normal hours and with no compensation. Overall, it appears that international activities are not really a strategic or organisational priority issue for schools, but rather the responsibility of dedicated individuals.

Evaluation of what took place after the stay abroad

- **Evaluations** (by the intermediary organisations and the sending schools) were carried out both during the “end-of-stay” seminars of the intermediary organisations and by the sending schools. The schools’ evaluation tended to evaluate more the academic outcome of the experience, focusing on what the pupil had “missed” rather than what it had gained from the experience of living in another country.
- **Recognition:** The lack of recognition procedures was judged to be the main negative factor of the pilot exchange. Participating pupils were in many cases forced to follow a “double curriculum”, where they struggled to adapt to the host environment and the academic requirements in the host school while at the same time trying to keep up with the curriculum in their home school. The cause was partly the failure of sending and hosting schools to agree on joint learning agreements for the pupils, which could tackle the issue in a practical

manner; and partly the inflexibility of school systems, which did not allow for more individualised learning trajectories.

- **Perspectivation:** in order to learn from what the pupils have been exposed to, to place their discoveries in relationship with objects and practices in their own home culture, a structured reflection process took place. Intermediary organisations have developed techniques and methods to facilitate this process. Some of the sending schools have encouraged their pupils to make presentations or to talk about their experience.
- **Retention and Reintegration:** both of these aspects are a long-term process and one that has not been possible to follow-up on in the framework of this evaluation.

2.10 Expert's assessment of barriers and challenges to be tackled as part of the new individual mobility strand of the Comenius action

Specifically in relation to the pilot project, the high rate of premature returns can be attributed in part to a set of factors in the construct of the pilot and a further set of factors of a more general nature and not specifically related to the pilot project.

2.10.1 Problems associated with the pilot

The first set of factors is related to the **very short deadline** that schools were given to find potential participants and make agreements with their partner schools abroad. This affected in particular the selection and preparation of pupils, with knock-on effects later. This was compounded by a second element – the confusion by some schools as to their actual role in this project and their reluctance to take ownership of the project. If intermediary organisations are to be involved in the future, appropriate attention to this issue is recommended.

2.10.2 Structural problems

The most serious issue identified by the expert is of a general nature, and this is the issue of **recognition**. Participating pupils have been expected not only to attend classes in the host schools, but also to follow the curriculum of their home school. Some have had to sit additional exams once they returned home. Such double course work places excess stress on the shoulders of pupils who are already fighting to cope with the adaptation process to a completely new environment and may arguably be the cause of premature returns.

Another structural factor which impacts negatively on transnational mobility in secondary schools is the **lack of internationalisation strategies at school level**. The frustration over this is evident in many replies, and some teachers make it clear that it goes for the “position” of Comenius coordinator generally – that the time spend on the activities in relation to this action are unpaid, and that they are expected to cover their ordinary workload (teaching) at the same time, with no reduction in hours. It emerged quite clearly from these that the international activities in half of the schools were less the result of an institutional strategy than the initiative of committed and idealistic individuals among the staff (typically language teachers). They carried out their work more or less in isolation from their colleagues as individuals rather than team-members. This raises some important concerns for future exchange activities. When practically everything in connection with international activities – from planning to execution - is concentrated in the hands of one or at most a few individuals rather than an integral feature of the organisation, it becomes vulnerable. Once this person leaves, all personal contacts and practical experience and

expertise with international projects disappear from the organisation, and work on new activities has to be resumed more or less from scratch, with obvious consequences for the quality of the activities.

Seen in a holistic perspective, Dr. Kristensen missed (1) the **presence of individual learning agreements for participating pupils**, which would have tackled the recognition issue and thus removed a significant stress-factor from the stay and (2) **a more concerted approach by the involved actors** (notably schools and the intermediary organisations) so that activities could be coordinated and fine-tuned.

2.11 Expert's recommendations for the new individual mobility strand of the Comenius action

The evaluation identified a number of positive factors ("examples of good practice"), but points out that a closer scrutiny is needed to uncover and describe all. Whereas it is perfectly possible to copy and emulate the majority, the evaluation concludes that there is a major challenge to make all actors adhere to a shared set of quality criteria in the future. In the pilot project, the intermediary organisations were responsible (wholly or in part) for all pedagogical and practical arrangements, with the exception of learning agreements and recognition, and were consequently in a position to impose their own quality criteria, which were shared by national organisations in all 10 countries. In a future scenario, where schools (and National Agencies) may take a more prominent role, differences in perception, understanding and priorities may become a lot more pronounced. This may in turn lead to problems in maintaining an adequate quality, as the individual elements in the quality assurance system need to be in balance with one another. Lacunae in the provision of e.g. preparation will affect the overall quality of the activity, even though the other elements are carried out in a satisfactory manner. Attention must therefore, first and foremost, be paid to the quality assurance system as such, rather than to individual tools and practices. However, the following are viewed as an essential part of the individual long-term pupil mobility in the Comenius programme:

- accommodation organised as home stays (host families);
- the elaboration of individual learning agreements as a prerequisite for participation, to be signed by both sending and hosting schools as well as the pupil him- or herself;
- 24/7 monitoring;
- Mentoring;
- adequate preparation and debriefing undertaken both at local and central (national) level;
- transparency for all actors at all levels in the process.

2.12 EFIL's recommendations for the new individual mobility strand of the Comenius action

As part of the project, the European Federation for Intercultural Learning made the following recommendations on the administration and management of the individual pupil mobility action of Comenius. The recommendations deal primarily with the following aspects:

- the role of the National Agencies as guarantors of the quality of the programme;
- the truly multilateral and innovative nature of the action;

- the special circumstances of exchanging minors.

The National Agencies and the schools will have a key role in the administration of the mobility scheme. It is crucial to understand, as pointed out by the external expert¹, that the pedagogical and practical aspects of the exchange are not a list of disjointed items but rather a coherent system in which none of the parts can be seen in isolation but must be coordinated and balanced with one another and that “quality in mobility” can only be achievable if all aspects are covered. The European Commission and the National Agencies should therefore retain full control over the quality of the programme implementation at all levels, guaranteeing an equal access to all eligible participants in the programme while safeguarding the health and safety of the pupils being exchanged.

As is the case with the exchanges taking place under the European Voluntary Service Programme, the National Agencies should be free to rely on existing civil society networks with relevant expertise. When choosing possible civil society actors, the National Agencies should be mindful about choosing organisations that fully respect the criteria set by the European Quality Charter for Mobility and/or additional criteria such as legal status, years of experience in both sending and hosting on educational exchanges and previous experience with this target group. Another key criterion would be the extent to which their expertise and know-how can quickly and efficiently be tapped into across many Member States and target groups (schools and families). Should expertise in this form be sought, the National Agencies must establish contractual frameworks and benchmarks and ensure a continuous monitoring of the services thus provided.

Taking into account the results of our survey, a single **recommendation on the most suitable length and timing** would be unjust. However, according to recommendations made by stakeholders, different schemes can be recommended according to the age of the pupil. For the younger age group (14-15 year olds), shorter exchanges of 3 months are recommended, while full or semester exchanges are accessible to a higher age group (16-18 years old).

Until proper accreditation is afforded to secondary school pupils spending part of their studies abroad, the ideal timing of the exchange would be the start of the school year abroad, so that missed exams can be taken during the second semester for those having been away for 3 or 6 months. Those being absent during their last year of schooling should arrange for the possibility to sit their exams abroad or after their return in case the school cannot recognise the credits obtained abroad. For those spending a full year abroad, the timing must coincide with the start of the school year. To allow for a proper integration into the family and some time to familiarize themselves with the new language, an arrival two weeks before the start of school is ideal.

2.12.1 Recommendations for the organisational and pedagogical framework for the future action.

1. Guaranteeing a harmonious, multi-lateral participation of all schools in the programme

One of our key recommendations is that the European Commission establishes common rules and quality benchmarks for all schools and ensures that no national priorities (for example restrictions on types of Comenius schools, thematic restrictions, geographic restrictions, etc.) are established at national level. Likewise, a simultaneous timing of the annual calls for the programme in all

¹ Dr. Søren Kristensen, Techne (Denmark)

participating programme countries is crucial in guaranteeing a smooth European-wide co-operation.

We recommend furthermore an intense sharing of practices among the National Agencies and between the schools and the National Agencies in order to transfer good practices as quickly as possible.

2. Guaranteeing an equitable access to the programme

Different levels of support from school to school are almost unavoidable. But we see two major challenges that may affect the participation of schools in the future scheme:

- a. the lack of appropriate co-ordination inside the schools;
- b. language barriers of the school personnel coordinating the exchange.

Funding support (a management fee for participating schools) and incentives for schools and pupils that undertake mobility projects with countries speaking less widely spoken languages, should be envisaged in the programme implementation.

3. Guaranteeing objectivity in the selection and support of pupils

Due to the fact that immersion in another culture over a period of time brings with it specific challenges, it is crucial that the pupils interested in spending part of their studies in one of the COMENIUS partner schools are given the opportunity to fully master the exchange. An important element in the success of educational exchanges is an appropriate selection of the young pupils on the basis of their adaptability to new circumstances and their tolerance of ambiguity.

As the proposed new COMENIUS action anticipates a major role for the schools in the selection and screening process, we recommend the assistance of persons who have no particular role or position in the school during the selection process in order to ensure a balanced screening of potential candidates, unencumbered by considerations of academic proficiency. In addition, programme guidelines should specifically address this issue and draw attention to personal character traits that will facilitate the study abroad period.

The need for neutrality is also crucial in the support of the hosted pupil. Ideally, a person that does not have a role in the school and that entertains no relationship to the members of the host family should act as a mentor to the pupil.

4. Guaranteeing an appropriate preparation of the pupils

Preparation is undertaken prior to departure in order to increase the participants' ability to cope with the various challenges and to maximise the learning potential of the activity. Echoing Dr. Kristensen's recommendations, five different types of preparations should be organised prior to the exchange:

- linguistic preparation: where participants are prepared to cope with communications in another language other than their own;
- cultural preparation: where participants learn about differences in culture and mentality between their own and the host country and how to deal constructively with problems caused by these;

- practical preparation: where participants are informed about and given instructions on what to do in connection with potential problems in relation to travel, accommodation, health and safety, financial matters, bureaucracy etc.
- pedagogical preparation: where learning methodologies and learning outcomes are discussed with the participants and a learning plan for the stay elaborated and agreed upon;
- psychological preparation: where participants are prepared to cope with possible psychological problems arising during the stay (feelings of loneliness, homesickness, conflicts, “culture shock” etc.).

5. Ensuring appropriate insurance covering health and other risks

The European Commission must ascertain that appropriate health care is afforded to all pupils throughout the programme in all 31 programme countries and take out insurance covering all residual risks associated with the new mobility action (as is the case for the European Voluntary Service). If not the EU, it will be the responsibility of the National Agencies, the schools or the parents/legal guardian(s) to take out insurance.

6. Guaranteeing a 24/7 support structure for pupils and families

Because of the age group that is the intended beneficiary of this COMENIUS programme, we recommend a number of requirements in order to safeguard the pupils’ physical and psychological well-being.

The annual call should set out clear responsibilities to all those involved in the exchange (from a sending and a hosting perspective). Aside from addressing possible adaptation issues during trainings and orientations, the schools must make sure that all pupils are familiar with the local support system, the identity and the contact details of the responsible persons. Both the National Agencies and the schools should consider writing a crisis manual to deal with critical situations (missing children, accidents, involvement in illegal activities, etc).

7. Ensuring proper retention of acquired competencies and a proper re-integration of the pupils after their return

The main priority of the schools is likely to focus on the academic re-integration of the pupil, assisting him/her in catching up with the possible lacunae in their academic skills caused by the absence from their home school. However, in order to hold on to the positive developments that have happened during the stay abroad, guidance counsellors or teachers should offer assistance to help the participants act upon new insights and competencies acquired during their stay.

A final issue in the debriefing process is perspectivation and reintegration, which has to do with easing the return of the participants into their old environment. As with retention, it constitutes an important part of the engineering of long-term individual mobility projects.

8. Ensuring appropriate accreditation and valorisation of the programme

In the absence of proper accreditation for study periods spent outside of the country, the National Agencies should assist the pupils and the schools in dealing with the accreditation of the exchange period as well as complementary tools to validate the mobility experience (EUROPASS, CoE Language Portfolio).

They should make sure that the pupils are placed in the right grade or age group and that they receive adequate support to help in their integration - academic and otherwise. Schools should also be encouraged to establish ongoing communication prior to and during the exchange with their partner school and liaise on curriculum issues. If possible, individual learning plans should be established.

Furthermore, the National Agencies should disseminate the achievements and the results of the pupil mobility action within COMENIUS partnerships in order to optimise their value, strengthen their impact and ensure that the largest possible number of pupils and schools benefit from them.

2.12.2 Recommendations on the core content of training and support

The educational objectives of the trainings and the support afforded to young pupils, their families and their host families is to help the young participants maximise the learning outcomes of the experience and to manage the risks associated with the exchange of minors. It is recommended that the trainers be qualified volunteers or staff members, familiar with cross-cultural experiences and the necessary pedagogical background.

When	What	How
On arrival	Survival orientation	½ - 1 day
Shortly after arrival	Language training	Schools/private courses
4-6 weeks after arrival	Intercultural orientation	2/3 days
Mid-term (for longer exchange periods)	Mid-term evaluation	1 weekend
End-of-stay (3-4 weeks before departure for longer exchange periods) (1-2 weeks before departure for shorter exchange periods)	Final evaluation	2/3 days

A) Training for incoming pupils (takes place in the hosting country during the stay)

Survival orientation

Objective: the main objective of the ‘survival orientation’ is to give basic information about the hosting country, with a special focus on safety measures and practical issues. The goal is to let pupils start their stay abroad with the tools and means that will allow them to better cope with immediately upcoming situations.

Expected outcomes: the pupils have been briefed about the European dimension in education and in particular the COMENIUS programme. They have established contacts with key intermediaries (representatives of the permanent 24/7 support structure), know who their out-of-school mentor and their academic tutor will be and whom to contact for what. They have received information on essential features of daily life in the hosting country and the school system.

Furthermore, the pupils have made contact with other pupils undergoing the same experience.

Language training

Pupils should be provided with an equivalent of at least 20 hours of intensive language training, when possible in cooperation with the hosting schools.

Intercultural orientation

Objective: the main objective of the intercultural orientation is to: help the pupils adapt to cultural and personal challenges; allow them to get to know other young people undergoing a similar experience; and to build a network during their stay abroad. This orientation also aims at sharing their first experiences within the new cultural environment, answering questions and giving tools to face conflict situations. For shorter stays it is possible to merge the survival orientation with the intercultural orientation and have them both upon arrival.

Expected outcomes: the pupils have received information on key aspects of the culture and the social and family life in the host country and are aware of cultural differences. They will know how to deal with them in conflict situations. They have shared their first adjustment difficulties in their families or schools. They are becoming aware of differences in non-verbal behaviour, language use and differences in cultural values between their home country and the hosting country. They are familiar with the intercultural adjustment process and know how to deal with possible cultural shocks.

Mid-term evaluation (only for exchange schemes longer than 5/6 months)

Objectives: this meeting should allow the pupils to evaluate and share their experience so far and define objectives for the last part of the stay in the hosting country.

Expected outcomes: the pupils have evaluated their intercultural learning experience so far, including the quality of their relationship with the host family and the social environment. Critical/conflict situations have been identified and there is an action plan in place.

Final evaluation

Objectives: the final evaluation aims at (1) helping the pupils systematise and assess their intercultural learning experiences, and (2) helping them to place their individual experiences in a global dimension. This last meeting also aims at preparing a smooth return after a prolonged stay abroad with special reference to the “reverse culture shock”.

Expected outcomes: the pupils have been given an opportunity to assess the intercultural learning that has occurred during the stay abroad and have reflected upon the meaning of returning to their home countries. They have been given the opportunity to assess their increased knowledge of Europe (and more generally of global issues), a broader understanding of cultural diversity and their attitude towards what is different. The pupils are aware of needed documentation in order to obtain the proper recognition of their study abroad period and are, more generally, familiar with the EUROPASS certification process and know how to act on recognition and retention issues.

B) Training for outgoing pupils (takes place in the sending country before and after the stay)

When	What	How
2 months before departure	Pre-departure training & orientation	1 weekend
On the departure day	Pre-departure meeting	1 – 3 hours
3 to 6 weeks after return	Post-return orientation and evaluation	½ day

Pre-departure training and orientation (and pre-departure meeting)

Objectives: the pre-departure trainings mainly aim at promoting intercultural learning and help prevent as much as possible the possibility of a cultural shock. It focuses on expectations and concerns regarding the experience, practical aspects and logistics, problem solving and conflict management.

Expected outcomes: the pupils are familiar with the applicable rules and regulations in the hosting country and those of the Comenius programme and have shared their expectations and concerns. They know what kind of preparation they have to make with their home school to ensure the best possible conditions for the recognition of their studies abroad. They have reflected on the meaning of intercultural learning, cultural differences and values.

Post-return orientation and evaluation

Objectives: the main objective of this training is to help the participants evaluate the impact of the study period abroad and how to make use of competences and skills acquired during the stay. It should also focus on providing them with tools to cope with a possible “reverse culture shock”, and other adjustment difficulties.

Expected outcomes: The pupils have shared possible difficulties in re-adjusting to the home environment and received tools to face possible problems with re-entry into the school environment. They are familiar with the opportunities and responsibilities that result from the mobility scheme they have taken part in, and, if applicable, whether the objectives of the learning plan have been met. They know whom to contact in case of follow-up problems (with certification, recognition, outstanding insurance matters). Together with the other young people they have been able to go through a thorough debriefing with opportunities of perspective.

C) Training for host families

Trainings for host families should take place before the arrival of the pupils in the host families. It is recommended to organise *regular* meetings with host families as an ongoing sharing and evaluation opportunity.

Objectives: the meetings aim at preparing the host families on logistical (residence permit, insurance, liability,...), intercultural (reflections on cultural differences, values, conflict situations,...) and practical (support, emergency procedures, adjusting difficulties,...) matters. The host families should have the opportunity to share expectations and concerns.

D) Training for sending families

Families play an important role in a successful mobility experience, in the way they support their children before departure, when they are abroad and once back home.

Objectives: the main objectives of the training are helping the families understand what the pupils are going to experience, and giving them the tools to support the pupils. It also aims at clarifying practical aspects of the mobility scheme.

E) Training for hosting schools

Hosting schools should be provided with a handbook including legal background information, advice and hints on how to support the pupils, suggestions on how to involve pupils in the new school environment, tools for intercultural learning education, how to monitor and evaluate the hosting experience, emergency procedures and administrative guidelines for the individual mobility programme.

Additionally, all hosting schools should have a contact person/help desk and receive support when needed. It is furthermore recommendable to offer the opportunity to share good practices, difficulties and success stories in meetings or seminars.

2.12.3 Recommendation on the support structure

Regular support in the form of contacts and – when needed - interventions throughout the experience can help pupils, together with sending and/or host families come to terms with the challenges of the exchange experience. Contact on a regular basis rather than during a "crisis" allows for the development of a relationship based on trust between the support/contact person and the pupils.

A similar support system should be available to sending and hosting schools. To stimulate the learning aspects of the experience, sending and hosting schools should be provided with a support structure that assists them in all decisions regarding the COMENIUS exchange and in particular on issues of adaptation, integration and academic recognition.

On the hosting side

Every pupil should be assigned a contact person or tutor by the hosting school. This person will help the pupil with the adjustments and/or problems related to the school and the school environment. In addition, every pupil should also have a contact person or mentor at local level,, who will provide support in adjusting to the hosting culture and liaise with the host family in case of problems. It is of utmost importance that the assigned mentor be a neutral person, not connected to the school or the family. Every host family will have a contact person or counsellor at local level, assigned by the coordinating organisations.

On the sending side

Parents need to have a contact person they can stay in touch with during the COMENIUS experience of their child. The contact person should counsel the family on practical issues but also on possible emotional distress which often arises when a child goes abroad for a longer time.

2.12.4 Charter of Rights to establish roles and responsibilities

A basic aspect of quality assurance is to make sure that problems have little chance of happening, and if they do, can be contained with minimal negative effects on everyone involved. Because COMENIUS exchanges will involve minors, it is important that the roles and responsibilities of each participant (families, pupils, schools, National Agencies and eventually intermediary organisations) are precisely spelled out.

As has been highlighted in our evaluation, even small misunderstandings or different expectations can quickly evolve into conflicts or bad feelings on all parts. The school may feel that the student is not making an effort while the academic requirements of the sending school are making it virtually impossible for the exchange student to focus on the studies in the host school; a hosted student may enjoy more freedoms at home or vice-versa – there are a plethora of issues that need to be clarified and agreed to prior to the exchange.

2.13 Conclusions

The text above summarizes the main findings of the research, the evaluation of the pilot exchange and the recommendations for the future implementation of individual mobility opportunities within the COMENIUS action.

The study in 31 European countries has revealed that few restrictions exist on the interruption of a school year, and that in most countries no particular legal framework applies to the exchange of pupils. Specific legislation dealing with the certification of studies taken abroad has been developed fairly recently. While all countries welcome foreign pupils into their schools, they are also concerned about safeguarding their borders and about protecting young people under the age of 18. It turns out obtaining a proper diploma as a foreign student is difficult. Europass remains the best informal option to record study periods abroad, but to date has been used very little outside the official EU mobility programmes.

Aside from intangible and practical aspects, the incompatibility of the curriculum between the sending and the hosting school is seen as one of the main obstacles to proper recognition. As has been the case with the pilot exchange, the survey also found that the extra investment required by the teachers to deal with educational mobility projects is mentioned consistently as one of the difficulties of educational mobility.

Specialised mobility providers offer primarily yearlong, multilateral study programmes. They adhere to a quality charter of their own. At the end of 2006, the European Commission introduced the European Quality Charter of Mobility. Other stakeholders (European Secondary School Heads Association, European Parents Association, Organising Bureau of Secondary School Students) all support the proposed new action.

The internal evaluation of the more operational aspects of the pilot exchanges has highlighted as main academic challenges the difficulties with the grading system in foreign schools, differences in curriculum and teaching methods, as well as language difficulties. It was recommended that schools would cooperate more intensely and that a clearer insight into different educational systems would be guaranteed. On the operational side, the additional workload for teachers, administrative procedures including the management of the grant, and the search for host families turned out to be the major challenges.

As for the external expert's evaluation, the most serious issue identified is the issue of recognition. Participating pupils not only attend classes in the host school, but are also expected to follow the curriculum at their home school, placing extra stress on their shoulders. Another structural factor which impacts negatively on transnational mobility is the lack of internationalisation strategies at school level. The external expert further views as an essential part of the individual long-term pupil mobility in the Comenius programme: accommodation

organised as home stays (host families), 24/7 monitoring, mentoring, adequate preparation, the elaboration of individual learning agreements, and transparency for all actors.

EFIL's recommendations deal primarily with the following aspects: the role of the National Agencies as guarantors of the quality of the programme, the truly multilateral and innovative nature of the action, and the special circumstances of exchanging minors. For the organisational and pedagogical framework for the future action, it is recommended to guarantee a harmonious, multi-lateral participation of all schools in the programme with common rules and quality benchmarks; equitable access to the programme; objectivity in the selection and support of pupils; appropriate preparation of the pupils; appropriate insurance covering health and other risks; 24/7 support structure for pupils and families; appropriate accreditation and valorisation of the programme; proper retention of acquired competencies and a proper re-integration of the pupils after their return. It is further recommended that training and support for incoming pupils will consist of 'survival' orientation, language training, intercultural orientation, mid-term evaluation and a final evaluation. Outgoing pupils will receive support through a pre-departure orientation, post-return orientation and evaluation. Trainings for host families, sending families and hosting schools, should not be overlooked.

3. The current pupil mobility situation

Between December 2006 and February 2007, the European Federation for Intercultural Learning (EFIL) with the assistance of European Educational Exchanges -Youth for Understanding (EEE-YFU), undertook a study in 31 countries on existing major pupil mobility schemes and issues surrounding their operation, such as legal issues related to the mobility of minors, the recognition in different countries of study periods spent abroad, and possible obstacles to pupil mobility.

For the full report we refer to the “**First Interim Report**” approved by the European Commission. Please find an executive summary of this report below.

3.1 Regulatory frameworks affecting pupil mobility

For outgoing pupils, very few restrictions exist with regard to the interruption of a school year. Specific legislation dealing with the certification of studies taken abroad has been developed fairly recently and bilateral or multilateral agreements exist only in rare cases. Study periods abroad may be recognised even in the absence of proper legislation. Schools have great freedom in deciding whether pupils should be allowed to interrupt their schooling in order to participate in an exchange programme.

Several governments encourage the mobility, notably through governments grants made available to pupils who undertake studies abroad.

From our respondents, we established that, aside from intangible and practical aspects such as the importance of the last year of studies, the incompatibility of the curriculum between the sending and the hosting school is seen as one of the main obstacles to proper recognition. This is followed by the legal vacuum on matters of recognition.

For incoming pupils, specific regulations dealing with the certification of their studies carried out for up to one school year in the country are rare, although it is always possible to obtain a certification of some kind. While theoretically possible in 18 out of 31 countries, obtaining a proper diploma remains difficult. Europass remains the best “informal” option to record study abroad periods, but has been used very little outside the official EU mobility programmes.

All countries welcome foreign pupils into their schools but are concerned about safeguarding their borders and about protecting young people under the age of 18. In terms of visas and residence permits, the requirements are minimal for pupils from the EU or Schengen countries. For non-EU citizens wishing to spend more than 3 months in a country, visas and/or residence permits are mandatory. Most pupils undertaking study abroad programmes during their secondary schooling are minors and fall under special legal protection.

3.2 Experience of schools with mobility projects

In order to maintain relevance, when undertaking the evaluation of schools with mobility experience, only those with long term individual pupil mobility experience were contacted. It was recommended to include different types of schools in the evaluation: public and private, vocational (technical) and general, etc.

However, as the aim of the survey was not to collect statistics on mobility, there was no need to include a large sample of schools.

For outgoing pupils, most schools encourage study abroad programmes and rely on the assistance of specialised exchange providers to organise it. The majority of schools do not consider a study abroad programme as presenting any type of difficulty, except perhaps when it comes to the difference in curricula. The majority of schools did not feel as though pupils having studied abroad faced particular challenges in their re-integration upon return.

For incoming pupils, the hosting schools judged both the lack of proficiency in the language and the different levels of knowledge in specific subject matters as the major obstacles in the integration of foreign pupils in the hosting school. Schools often develop their own mentoring system to help in the hosted pupil's integration.

On the subject of collaboration between schools, the schools indicated that they would welcome the exchange of information on the school system, the grades and the foreign pupil's course programme at home. More than a third would also welcome regular contact between schools during the exchange.

According to the schools, the major advantage provided by private associations organising pupil exchanges is the know-how and expertise they possess. Schools organising their own mobility do so for programmes of shorter duration and it appears that schools work primarily on a bilateral level and very much within school partnerships.

When going on an exchange, most pupils are between 15-19 years old. According to the schools, popular European destinations of pupils are: Germany, United Kingdom, France and Italy. In terms of hosting, most countries host from: Germany, Italy, Belgium, Finland, Norway and France.

3.3 Experience of Mobility Providers

Experienced mobility providers offer primarily year-long, multilateral study programmes. They usually select both the participants and the host families based on a number of criteria. Support to pupils, families and schools during the exchange form a major part of the mobility provider's tasks: aside from assuming the risks associated with the exchange of minors, all of them offer ongoing mentoring support and structured training opportunities to outgoing and incoming pupils, families and, more rarely, schools at different times during the lifecycle of the programme. They propose specific (and often mandatory) insurance.

Currently, mobility providers adhere to a quality charter of their own. At the end of 2006, the European Commission introduced the European Quality Charter for Mobility.

3.4 Research and Statistics

Very few statistics exist on individual pupil mobility to date. The most prolific research on the subject of pupil exchanges has been published in Germany, the European country with perhaps the most mobile pupils. The most common findings of relevance to the individual mobility

programme is that life and socialisation outside of school is the Achilles heel of successful exchanges, and that preparations and orientations as well as an independent (neutral) mentoring system to support the hosted pupils are a key success factor in exchanges.

3.5 Other stakeholders

The European Secondary Heads Association (ESHA), the European Parents Association (EPA) and the Organising Bureau of Secondary School Student Unions (OBESSU) all support the individual mobility of pupils, despite the fact that each federation foresees slightly different objectives for the programme. While ESHA focuses on the European idea and European citizenship and the pupil's development, EPA underlines the learning of foreign languages and the cultural experience as the main added value for pupils. ESHA, while acknowledging the benefits of year-long exchanges also sees the academic benefit of three-month exchanges. OBESSU would leave the choice on the type of exchange up to the pupil, keeping all options available: trimester, semester and year exchanges. However, OBESSU expressed concerns regarding the budgetary cutbacks of the Lifelong Learning Programme, in particular the reduced budget for student mobility, which is contradictory to the European Parliament's and the European Commission's commitment towards a better investment in youth.

4. Recommendations for the design and implementation of a future framework

Based on the analysis of the context of secondary pupil mobility in 31 European countries and the evaluation made of the pilot exchange by 294 pupils (100%), 101 hosting schools (36%) and 245 sending schools(100%), this document proposes a support framework for the new pupil mobility action.

The following recommendation focuses on the administration and management of the action. Our recommendations on the length and timing of mobility together with recommended requirements regarding the content of a training and support structure for incoming and outgoing pupils, host schools and host families, remain unchanged. For the full report on these recommendations we refer to the “**Second Interim Report**” of the project, approved by the European Commission.

The National Agencies have an important role in the administration of the individual pupil mobility scheme. They should have control over the quality of programme implementation at all levels and guarantee an equal access to all eligible participants in the programme while safeguarding the health and safety of the pupils being exchanged. It is crucial to understand, as pointed out by the external expert², that the pedagogical and practical aspects of the exchange are not a list of disjointed items but rather a coherent system where no single aspect should be regarded in isolation but should be co-ordinated and balanced with all other aspects of the programme and that “quality in mobility” is only achievable when all such aspects are covered.

Because of the age group that is the intended beneficiary of this Comenius programme, we recommend a number of requirements in order to safeguard the pupils’ physical and psychological well-being.

If appropriate, the National Agencies should be free to rely on existing civil society networks with relevant expertise (as is the case with the exchanges taking place under the European Voluntary Service Programme). When choosing possible civil society actors, the European Commission should be mindful about choosing actors:

- that fully respect the criteria set by the European Quality Charter for Mobility (in Annex) and/or additional criteria such as legal status, years of experience in both sending and hosting of educational exchanges, official recognition as educational or youth organisations, feed-back from national consumer agencies, previous experience in this field (target groups), staffing, the qualification of its staff or its volunteers, its non-profit character, its financial resources, its ability to deal with disadvantaged participants, etc.
- that have expertise and know-how that can quickly and efficiently be tapped into across many Member States and target groups (schools and families),

Should the National Agencies (N.A.) seek specific know-how from specialised organisations,

- The N.A. must establish contractual frameworks, specifying the nature of the services with relevant quality benchmarks for each;

² Dr. Søren Kristensen, Techne (Denmark)

- The National Agencies must ensure a continuous monitoring of the services thus provided (evaluations by sending and hosting schools, pupils & families (both sending and hosting sides))

4.1 Guaranteeing a harmonious, multi-lateral participation of all schools in the programme

Because of the innovative character of the programme, the communication with the eligible programme participants will be crucial. As was highlighted in the evaluation, several shortcomings of the pilot phase could be attributed to the late dissemination of the initial call and the late start of the programme.

We recommend:

- a strong communication between the National Agency and the school community with regard to information about the new action, the timing of the annual call, all related timelines and preparations the schools can take prior to the release of the actual call.
- the simultaneous timing of the annual calls for the programme in all participating programme countries through the traditional means that the National Agencies use in reaching all eligible programme participants;
- the establishment of short seminars for interested schools about all practical aspects related to the exchange;
- the establishment of a National Agency help desk or a web-site for “frequently asked questions” accessible to schools, families and pupils;
- a wide dissemination of the achievements and the results of the pupil mobility within Comenius partnerships in order to optimise their value, strengthen their impact and ensure that the largest possible number of pupils and schools benefit from them.

4.2 Guaranteeing an equitable access to the programme

Different levels of support from school to school are almost unavoidable. But language barriers of the school personnel coordinating the exchange might lead to partnerships being primarily arranged among schools that are able to easily communicate amongst themselves, shutting out certain schools and indeed schools in country with less widely known languages. Additionally, smaller, less well-endowed schools may not be able to deal with the added bureaucracy of the programme. Even with well-established users of EU funding schemes, teachers may not want to deal with the extra workload brought by the requirements of the programme.

We recommend:

- for the operational management, the European Commission should establish common enforceable rules and quality benchmarks;
- for the operational management, the European Commission should ensure that separate national priorities are not established (for example restrictions on types of Comenius schools, thematic restrictions, geographic restrictions, etc. which will make the transnational matching very difficult);

- to guarantee linguistic diversity, the European Commission should envisage the development of incentives for schools and pupils who undertake mobility projects with countries speaking less widely spoken languages;
- to guarantee linguistic diversity, the European Commission should envisage establishing a central help desk able to translate and interpret on behalf of schools when no common bridge language can be found in order to co-ordinate the exchange;
- to guarantee linguistic diversity, the National Agencies should envisage arranging the twinning of schools at local level, bringing together school personnel having complementary linguistic competences in order to communicate with potential host or sending schools;
- to guarantee equitable participation, we recommend that the role of the schools be recognised through an appropriate management fee to deal with the co-ordination of the programme.

4.3 Guaranteeing an even level of support

Because of the innovative character of the programme, the quality of the support provided by the National Agencies will be crucial. We recommend:

- an intense sharing of practices among the National Agencies to be co-ordinated at the European level in order to transfer good practices as quickly as possible;
- a general training for schools to be organised once a year.

4.4 Guaranteeing objectivity in the selection and support of pupils

Due to the fact that immersion in another culture over a period of time brings with it specific challenges, it is crucial that the pupils interested in spending part of their studies in one of the Comenius partner schools are given the opportunity to fully master the exchange. A crucial element in the success of educational exchanges is the appropriate selection of the young pupils on the basis of their adaptability to new circumstances and their tolerance of ambiguity.

As the proposed new Comenius action anticipates a major role for schools in the selection and screening process, EFIL recommends the assistance of persons who have no particular role or position in the school during the selection process in order to ensure a balanced screening of potential candidates, unencumbered by considerations of academic proficiency. In addition to that, programme guidelines should specifically address this issue and draw attention to personal character traits which will facilitate the study abroad period.

The need for neutrality is also crucial in the support of the hosted pupil. Ideally, a person who does not have a role in the school and who entertains no relationship to the members of the host family should act as a mentor to the pupil.

4.5 Guaranteeing appropriate preparation of the pupils

Preparation is undertaken prior to departure in order to increase the participants' ability to cope with the various challenges and to maximise the learning potential of the activity. Echoing Dr.

Kristensen's recommendations, five different types of preparations should be organised prior to the exchange:

- linguistic preparation: where participants are prepared to cope with communications in another language than their own;
- cultural preparation: where participants learn about differences in culture and mentality between their own and the host country and how to deal constructively with problems caused by these;
- practical preparation: where participants are informed about and given instructions on what to do in connection with potential problems in relation to travel, accommodation, health and safety, financial matters, bureaucracy etc.
- pedagogical preparation: where learning methodologies and learning outcomes are discussed with the participants and a learning plan for the stay elaborated and agreed upon;
- psychological preparation: where participants are prepared to cope with possible psychological problems arising during the stay (feelings of loneliness, homesickness, conflicts, "culture shock" etc.).

4.6 Ensuring an appropriate health insurance

Aside from respecting the content of the recommended training sessions on preventive safety measures for participants and families, we recommend:

- that the European Commission take out an insurance covering all risks associated with the new mobility action (as is the case for the European Voluntary Service). Alternatively, the National Agencies or the schools should take out special insurance.
- that the National Agencies provide the means to set-up volunteer networks able to assist in the support of pupils, families and schools associated with the programme.

4.7 Guaranteeing a 24/7 support structure for pupils and families

Experience shows that most problems on an exchange occur outside of the school. Aside from respecting the content of the recommended trainings, orientations and re-orientations on possible adaptation issues, we recommend:

- with respect to the exchange of pupils, and aside from administrative guidelines, relevant forms and charters, the annual call should set out clear responsibilities to all those involved in the exchange (from a sending and a hosting perspective);
- to assign responsibility within each of the host schools for setting-up a support system that is available at all times;
- to ensure that all pupils are familiar with this support system, the identity and the contact details of the responsible persons;
- that the National Agency should assist the schools in developing a crisis manual to complement its own instructions on how to deal with crisis situations (missing children, accidents, involvement in crimes, consumption of illegal substances, etc). Such guidelines should clearly spell out who is to contact who and how;

- to ensure joint training activities at national level, allowing the pupils to meet other pupils coming from other European countries, allowing them to create their own network of peer support.

4.8 Ensuring proper retention of acquired competencies and a proper re-integration of the pupils after their return

The main priority of the schools is likely to focus on the academic re-integration of the pupil, assisting him/her in catching up with the possible gaps in their academic skills caused by their absence from their home school. However, in order to hold onto the positive developments that have happened during the stay abroad, guidance counsellors or teachers should offer assistance to help the participants act upon the new insights and competencies acquired during their stay abroad.

A final issue in the debriefing process is reintegration, which has to do with easing the return of the participants into their old environment. As with retention, it constitutes an important part of the engineering of long-term individual mobility projects.

4.9 Ensuring appropriate accreditation and valorisation of the programme

In the absence of proper accreditation for study periods spent outside of the country, the National Agencies should assist the pupils and the schools in dealing with the accreditation of the exchange period as well as complementary tools to validate the mobility experience (EUROPASS, CoE Language Portfolio). For the schools, this means that the pupils should be placed in the right grade or age group and that they receive adequate support to help in their integration - academic and otherwise.

Furthermore, the National Agencies should disseminate information on the achievements and the results of the pupil mobility action within Comenius partnerships in order to optimise their value, strengthen their impact and ensure that the largest possible number of pupils and schools benefit from them.

5. Preparation of the exchanges

Below we have summarized the topics that were dealt with in the “**Third Interim Report**”. For the full report we refer to the document approved by the European Commission.

5.1 Different actors

With regard to the preparation of the exchanges, the roles of the various actors and their respective tasks were clarified. The four main actors consisted of sending schools, hosting schools, the local antennas of the intermediary organisations (AFS and YFU) and the European Federation for Intercultural Learning (EFIL).

5.2 Application process

At the end of January 2007 a pre-call was distributed to the national coordinators of the intermediary organisations. This pre-call was intended to spread the news about the pilot and reach interested schools. National Agencies were contacted and web-sites were updated with relevant information. The pilot scheme officially took off on the 15th of February when EFIL launched the call for applications.

Only schools and pupils that complied with all of the agreed eligibility criteria were allowed to participate in the Comenius pilot.

Eligible institutions:

- (4) had received a grant for a Comenius School Partnership (School Project, School Development Project or Language Project) in 2004, 2005 and/or 2006; and
- (5) were located in one of the 10 qualifying countries: Austria, Belgium, Denmark, Estonia, Finland, France, Germany, Hungary, Italy, Portugal; and
- (6) had a Comenius partner school in one of these countries.

Eligible pupils:

- (3) were aged between 14 and 18 years old; and
- (4) were nationals or permanent residents of one of the 10 eligible countries.

Through the call, interested schools were invited to express their interest in the pilot by returning a form to the national coordinators of the intermediary organisations in their country. While the form did not formally commit the school to take part in the pilot, it allowed 670 schools to express their interest in the project by February 25, 2007.

As a next step, schools were asked to send the formal application to the intermediary organisations by March 23rd 2007. The application had to be filled in both by the school and the pupil(s). In total the intermediary organisations received applications from 291 different schools. These applications involved 658 different pupils.

5.3 Selection of pupils

The intermediary organisations each organised a selection. A total of 580 interested pupils attended a selection activity.

All pupils were screened on the following criteria:

- motivation
- sense of initiative
- communication skills
- respect
- tolerance
- flexibility – adaptability
- perseverance
- sense of responsibility
- ability to see things in perspective
- curiosity
- helpfulness

At the end of the selection activities 341 pupils were selected to participate in the pilot. However, after the selection activities some schools withdrew from the scheme, or did not qualify to take part in the pilot. In some other cases the pupils and/or their parents changed their minds before the actual departure and withdrew from the pilot. Moreover, a number of exchanges could not take part because no host families were found to accommodate the pupils. In the end, 314 pupils participated in the pre-departure activities for the Comenius pilot.

5.4 Host family search

Schools hosting pupils were asked to identify host families for incoming pupils. The national coordinators of the intermediary organisations offered help and advice to support schools in their search for host families. Potential host families were then screened and selected by the intermediary organisations. This screening consisted of a visit to the family by experienced volunteers of these organisations, informal interviews with all family members and an assessment of the living conditions in the house.

The search for host families proved to be very difficult. By the 31st of May, the original deadline set to find host families, only 68% of the host families had been recruited by the schools. It was then decided that the intermediary organisations should start looking actively for families through their own volunteer networks. Deadlines for recruiting and visiting host families were eventually prolonged until the end of June. By then almost all host families were found. Still, a small number of exchanges could not take place because no host family was found.

5.5 Pre-departure training

The national coordinators of the intermediary organisations organised the pre-departure trainings according to different methodologies but all based on the same criteria. The pupils were given the opportunity to reflect upon the experience they were about to embark upon, and were given the tools to cope with the problems of adaptation and integration, which generally arise. Often

divided into smaller groups to encourage their adaptability in different circumstances, the pupils participated in workshops, group discussions, role plays, games, simulation exercises and presentations. They were also able to interact with previous exchange pupils and listen to their testimonies. Various topics were raised and the pupils had the chance to delph into detail and ask questions throughout the training.

Host families were brought together on a local level where they were able to share their expectations and raise questions in smaller groups. They were met by the local volunteers who helped them to meditate upon the experience that they were going to have and who shared best practices with them.

5.6 Administration of the pilot

For the purpose of the Comenius pilot EFIL drafted a Grant Agreement, which was an agreement between the applying schools and EFIL. Grants were managed by EFIL . The grant had to cover the pupil's travel expenses and contribute to the expenses in the hosting country, such as local transportations, school books, school excursions, etc.

International travel for the pupils was taken care of by the intermediary organisations in order to arrange for grouped arrivals in the hosting countries of all pupils. This guaranteed a common arrival orientation.

Allowances for expenses in the hosting country were paid out to pupils by the sending school. The monthly allowance was a flat-rate grant, different for each country, and decided upon by the European Commission.

For the purpose of the Comenius pilot exchanges, the intermediary organisations had accepted to carry the (legal) liability for the well-being of the participating pupils. This responsibility of the intermediary organisations was formally agreed upon through a special agreement based on a template provided by the AFS Intercultural Programmes network. As soon as a host family was confirmed in the hosting country, the pupil and his/her parents were asked to sign the agreement.

6. Pilot implementation

6.1 General overview

Although 314 pupils participated in the pre-departure activities, only 294 pupils started their 3 or 6 month exchange experience in August/September 2007. Twenty pupils ultimately decided to pull out of the project after the pre-departure activities. Of those remaining, 82% of the pupils went on a trimester exchange, 18% took part in a semester programme.

Countries involved were: Austria, Belgium, Denmark, Estonia, Finland, France, Germany, Hungary, Italy and Portugal. Coordination was taken care of by AFS intermediary organisations in all countries except Estonia and partly Germany where the local YFU offices handled the coordination of the pilot. Note that in Germany AFS and YFU were sharing the management of the programme. The same was true for the two Belgian AFS organisations, respectively covering the Flemish and French speaking part of Belgium.

For easy reference, abbreviations have been used in the tables below. Note that GER refers to AFS Germany, GEM to YFU Germany, BFL and BFR refer to the Flemish and French speaking parts of Belgium respectively.

Table 1 - Overview participants at the start of the pilot

	AUT	BFL	BFR	DEN	EST	FIN	FRA	GER	GEM	HUN	ITA	POR		TR	SM
AUT		2				3	8				7	1	21	16	5
BFL	1			1			1	3			7	1	14	14	0
BFR						4				1	4	2	11	11	0
DEN	1						2				1		4	4	0
EST				1				3	1		4		9	9	0
FIN	5		2				3	5	4	1	11	3	34	33	1
FRA	3					1		5	6	2	16		33	31	2
GER					1	3	6				11	1	22	22	0
GEM						7	9			1	12	1	30	6	24
HUN	1	1		1		3	6	2	5		4	1	24	14	10
ITA	8	7	1	4	2	12	18	12	13	1		3	81	70	11
POR						2	1			2	6		11	11	0
	19	10	3	7	3	35	54	30	29	8	83	13	294	241	53
	Hosting														
TR	19	8	3	4	3	22	37	29	22	7	74	12	240		
SM	0	2	0	3	0	13	17	1	7	1	9	1	54		

Table 2 - Overview participants at the end of the pilot

	AUT	BFL	BFR	DEN	EST	FIN	FRA	GER	GEM	HUN	ITA	POR		TR	SM
AUT		2				3	8				7	1	21	16	5
BFL	1			1			1	2			5	1	11	11	0
BFR						4				1	4	1	10	10	0
DEN	1						2				1		4	4	0
EST				1				3	1		4		9	9	0
FIN	5		2				3	4	4	1	10	3	32	31	1
FRA	3							4	6	2	14		29	27	2
GER					1	3	6				10	1	21	21	0
GEM						7	9			1	10	1	28	5	23
HUN	1	1		1		3	6	2	4		4	1	23	13	10
ITA	8	6	1	3	2	12	18	10	12	1		3	76	66	10
POR						2	1			2	6		11	11	0
	19	9	3	6	3	34	54	25	27	8	75	12	275	224	51
	Hosting														
TR	19	7	3	4	3	21	37	24	20	7	67	11	223		
SM	0	2	0	2	0	13	17	1	7	1	8	1	52		

Nineteen pupils (17 trimester and 2 semester) have returned to their home country prematurely, for various reasons (see below).

6.2 Trainings

During the actual exchange scheme, several training events were organised by the intermediaries. Standard in all countries were a pre-departure camp, an on-arrival camp and a language course, a mid-stay camp (on local level) and an end of stay-camp. Upon return all pupils were gathered locally or nationally to reflect upon their experience and guide them in their adaptation process of being back home (end-of-stay camp).

Below please find an overview of the training events in all ten countries and the methods used (Annex 9.1).

6.3 Obstacles encountered during exchange phase

6.3.1 Non-completion of the exchange

7.08% of all pupils participating in a trimester exchange returned home before the end of the agreed exchange period. This constitutes a significant difference with the average rate (of 3.5%) observed by one of the intermediary organisations (AFS) in their regular programmes.

There may be several reasons for this but the short preparation process, due to the short amount of time between the application and the actual departure (leading to a poor selection process and

hasty and difficult recruitments of host families, without an appropriate matching process between pupil and family), undoubtedly played an essential role.

Another important difference in comparison with the regular programmes of traditional exchange organisations, is that the school's direct involvement (especially from the side of the sending schools) heavily lopsided the experience in favour of an academic challenge. In light of the problems of recognition of academic achievements outside of the home country, sending schools tended to focus very much on the academic records at home, trying to make sure that pupils on the exchange would continue to do well at their home school upon return. They therefore tended to put a lot of pressure on the pupils to stay up to date on the curriculum of both their sending- and hosting school.

It should also be noted that the Comenius pilot is a fully funded activity with no financial commitment from the participant, which makes it 'easier' for pupils to decide to cut the programme short.

Overview of cases in which a pupil returned home early		
#	Issue	Handling
Home sickness		
1	A pupil felt home sick from the very beginning and insisted on going back home.	The intermediary organisation organised the pupil's return after a couple of days in the hosting country.
2	A pupil felt home sick and insisted on going back home.	Local volunteers provided counselling to find out if a prolonged stay was still possible, but in the end it was decided to have the pupil return home. The intermediary organisation organised the pupil's return.
3	A pupil felt home sick from the very beginning and secretly planned a flight back home.	Volunteers of the intermediary organisation found out about the flight planning and were able to give the pupil some comfort. The intermediary organisation helped her with her return home.
Psychological problems		
4	On the day of arrival in the hosting country, a pupil under recent psychological treatment mentioned she did not want to meet the host family.	The intermediary organisation organised the pupil's return home after the arrival camp. Psychological problems had not been mentioned in the application.
5	A pupil under recent psychological treatment had a very hard time adapting to the new environment and felt very anxious.	The intermediary organisation organised the pupil's return after a couple of days in the hosting country. Psychological problems had not been

		mentioned in the application.
6	After doing quite well during the first weeks abroad, a pupil all of a sudden started showing signs of great distress. After a lot of intense counselling it emerged that her father committed suicide between her selection for the pilot and the departure date. Neither the coordinating organisations nor her school were informed about this. A few years ago her brother had also committed suicide, although she had claimed, during her pre-departure orientations, that he had died in a car accident.	Local volunteers gave a lot of counselling and there was intense communication between the mother, host family, both schools and the involved coordinating organisations. The intermediary organisation organised the pupil's return, under the supervision of a psychologist who accompanied the pupil to her home country.
Pressure from family		
7	A pupil received text messages and phone calls from his mother several times a day in which she mentioned how much she missed him. This made it extremely difficult for the pupil to adapt and deal with the normal obstacles one encounters at the beginning of a stay abroad (language barriers, new school, host family).	The intermediary organisation organised the pupil's return.
8	The mother of a pupil requested that her daughter return home. Even though the pupil was having a great time in both the host family and hosting school, she felt pressured by her mother to come home. The pupil's grandmother lives with her family, and when she fell ill, the mother asked the pupil to return home.	The intermediary organisations offered support both to the family as well as to the pupil and the host family. When it was clear that the mother insisted on the pupil's return, all necessary arrangements for an early return home were made.
Adjustment problems in host family		
9	A pupil not getting along with his host family decided to return before the end of the term. It seems all involved tried hard to make things work, but without success.	The intermediary organisation had found a new host family for the pupil. But even though the pupil felt more at ease, with hardly any time to bond with her new family, she opted to return home early.
10	A pupil was unhappy with her host family and decided that she did not want to try a family change, but instead she preferred to return home.	The intermediary organisation organised the pupil's return.

Adjustment problems in general		
11	A pupil had problems adjusting and feel at ease. Meanwhile she was under high pressure to stay in the host country (particularly from the host school/teacher). The stress this pressure created was too much to carry for the student.	The volunteers of the intermediary organisation gave the pupil the necessary support and made her think and decide for herself what she really wanted. Eventually she decided to leave the programme. After all the necessary travel arrangements were made and documents signed (by pupil and parents), she changed her mind and approached the intermediary organisation to allow her to stay. This request was not granted.
12	A pupil had difficulties adapting to her new environment, a suburban area with social flats, and reported that she was scared to go outside. The host family members were always staying at home after school/work and had almost no social life. This made the pupil feel even worse and she asked to return home.	The intermediary organisation organised the pupil's return.
13	A pupil was not satisfied with her experience. She was not well integrated into the family, the school and the local group of the intermediary organisation.	Other exchange students informed the volunteers that in spite all the efforts that they had done to involve the pupil in their activities, she preferred not to participate, and dedicated her time to other things. The intermediary organisation organised the pupil's return.
14	A pupil wanted to stay abroad for 3 months only, instead of the originally planned 6 months. He feared that he would have problems at school after his return if he stayed abroad for too long. It also seemed that he did not feel very stimulated by his life in the hosting community, which didn't offer a lot of free time activities.	The sending school reassured him that he would receive all the necessary support from the school when he returned, but he decided to anticipate his return anyway. The intermediary organisation arranged for the pupil to return together with the trimester pupils.
15	A pupil appeared to be unable to adjust and made no effort at all to communicate. This resulted in very little interaction with the host family and peers at school.	The intermediary organisation offered extensive counselling and support, and finally opted to organise the pupil's early return.
Wrong expectations		
16	A pupil with wrong expectations showed no willingness to integrate with the host family. The pupil expected a three month holiday and it came to the point where he started blaming everyone for not having fulfilled these	Intensive communication with local volunteers couldn't change the pupil's attitude. The intermediary organisation organised the pupil's return.

	expectations.	
Crisis situation		
17	A pupil got involved with another exchange pupil. Unfortunately this resulted into a case where one of the pupils felt forced into having sex. Afterwards accusations were made toward each other and it resulted in arguments where nobody knew who was telling the truth or not.. The parents of the pupil flew over to the host country.	The intermediary organisation played an important role in keeping control of the situation by communicating with the pupil, the teachers, the hosting and sending school, the host family and the parents. The parents took the pupil back home.
Other		
18	A boy was hosted by a family whose daughter was hosted abroad by the boy's family (a case of full reciprocity). When the daughter decided to return home early, the boy did not feel like continuing his experience and returned home as well.	The boy attended the mid-stay camp and received support and advice from very experienced volunteers. Furthermore the volunteers offered him a placement with a new family and tried to convince him to finish his stay. In spite of all these efforts he decided to go home.
19	A pupil requested to return home after 3 months instead of the intended 6 months. No specific reason was given for this request.	The intermediary organisation organised for the pupil to return together with the trimester pupils.

6.3.2 Host family issues

#	Issue	Handling
1	After a pupil had lived for a few days with the family of his counsellor, it turned out he was feeling better there than in his current family. The pupil brought up the issue with the volunteer and stated that he did not see the need to live with people he did not like. Since he openly talked about this with his host family too, it was felt necessary to move him to a new one.	The intermediary organisation and its volunteers identified a new host family for the pupil, but explained to the pupil that there was a need for some investment from his side as well if he wanted to participate in the pilot.
2	A pupil was placed in a temporary family at the beginning of the pilot.	The school found a permanent placement.
3	Some problems – not related to the pupil – occurred in the pupil's host family, and they felt they could no longer host the pupil.	The intermediary organisation found a new host family for the pupil

4	A mismatch between a pupil and the host family caused a pupil to return home before the end of the term. It seems all involved tried hard to make things work, but without success.	The intermediary organisation found a new host family for the pupil. But even though the pupil felt more at ease, with hardly any time to bond with her new family, she opted to return home early.
5	A host school had arranged two host families, each one hosting the pupil for six weeks.	When volunteers of the intermediary organisation screened the second host family halfway through the trimester, they found out that there had been a misunderstanding between the contact teacher and the second host family, who was willing to host the pupil for the full three months. Therefore a host family change halfway through should not have been necessary.
6	A host family change was needed because a pupil did not get along with her host parents.	The intermediary organisation found a new host family for the pupil and arranged the transfer.
7	A pupil had problems with low weight and saw a doctor. After the host family's daughter returned home early from her Comenius exchange, the situation in the host family became very complex.	Sending and hosting schools, the intermediary organisations and the host family worked together to solve the situation. Finally the host school found a new host family for the girl.
8	A quiet and introvert pupil lived with a very active and dynamic host family. This caused some frictions.	In order to avoid further problems the intermediary organisation decided that it was preferable to move the pupil. He was hosted by a teacher of his hosting school during the final weeks of the pilot.
9	For a pupil, a double placement was foreseen, whereby she was supposed to move to her second host family in December.	Since the pupil got along so well with her current family, the host family offered to host the student for the entire period.
10	There were a few cases where the host school had not been able to find a host family for the entire period.	In these cases either the intermediary organisation or the host school searched for (and found) a second host family for the remaining time.
11	A pupil's brother was coming for a visit over Christmas (the involved intermediary organisations were uninformed of this) and the host family was stressed because of the many plans the pupil had made. The intermediary organisations learned that the hosting school had an Italian Comenius group	The intermediary organisations agreed on not denying the visit but also asked the pupil to understand the meaning of Christmas as a family holiday and not to require too much (parties etc.) from the host family but rather try to get to know the local Christmas traditions.

	(from the exchange pupil's school) visiting them. During this period the student's behaviour changed dramatically and several problems appeared (e.g. brother visiting, both of them wanting to attend several parties during the Christmas holidays and asking the host family to organise a party for the brother).	<p>After the pupil had spent the whole weekend with the visiting Comenius group, she called her host family and told them she was coming to pick up some things from home and wanted to spend the last night with the Comenius group.</p> <p>She then showed up with two Italian teachers, packed everything and left in a taxi. Both teachers put great pressure on the host mother (also a teacher of the hosting school) saying that she immediately had to arrange for a new, more suitable family. She finally called a local volunteer who promised to take the student from that Wednesday on. The headmaster of the hosting school promised to host until then.</p>
12	A pupil had strong mood swings and appeared frustrated. She felt she had gotten too little attention both from her school and family. She herself showed little initiative though and had problems making contacts. Although there were no distinct incidents, she asked to change families.	<p>School, coordinating organisations, local volunteers, and host family worked together to help the pupil cope with the situation. Intensive counselling was provided.</p> <p>The school came up with a new host family.</p>

6.3.3 Medical urgencies

#	Issue	Handling
1	One of the participating pupils had been diagnosed with medical problems. Urgent surgery was necessary. The parents did not feel comfortable with their son undergoing surgery outside of his home country and asked that their son be repatriated.	The intermediary organisation organised a flight back to his home country. The pupil, his parents and the host family asked if the pupil could be given the opportunity of returning to his host family and school after the surgery and recovery of the pupil. All actors agreed on this and costs will be covered by the AFS Medical Insurance.

6.3.4 Administration & Procedures

#	Issue	Handling
1	Grant agreements were filled in wrongly or important information was missing (missing bank details, missing budget, wrongly calculated budget, missing host school declaration, ...).	Intense and thorough follow-up by the EFIL office on the grant agreements was needed to collect them all. Eight grant agreements were still not fully completed and signed on 1 October 2007. Since communication with the schools took place and some commitment was shown, EFIL decided to go on with the exchange while the procedure regarding the grant agreements was still running.
2	Deadlines were not adhered to and many schools returned the grant agreements very late, making it hard if not impossible to get the grant allowance to the pupils in time.	Pupils pre-financed the initial costs of their exchange and arranged with their sending schools for the grants to be paid out in a later stage.
3	There appeared to be a substantial insecurity on the side of the schools regarding financial issues. Especially those schools that were hosting and sending at the same time often did not seem to know for whom or what the money was that they received. In general, most of the schools questioned the financial procedure and described it as too complicated.	The intermediary organisations as much as possible informed schools and parents about the procedures by answering their questions.
4	As it turned out the departure date (15/02/2008) for the pupils spending a semester in Finland coincided with the biggest high school event of the year in Finland. Most of the pupils were placed in the second grade of the Finnish high school system and this dance event was the biggest thing happening during the school year. Rehearsals for this event had already started the previous September.	After the consent of all involved (hosting schools, host families, sending schools, parents and the pupils themselves), the involved coordinating organisations altered the travel dates and the travel arrangements accordingly.
5	Certain host schools charged the pupils for their school lunches. There is no reference to these kind of expenses, nor in the management fee, nor in the grant.	It's not entirely correct to consider school lunches as part of the monthly allowance, paid out as part of the grant, since in principal boarding (lodging and food) is supposed to be part of the package the host family provides. The intermediary organisations didn't see

		any other option at this stage, than to ask the students to pay it from their allowances. In one case the allowance was not sufficient to cover all costs, so the parents paid some of the money.
6	In Finland some of the Comenius pupils lived in the countryside and if they were older than 16/17 they sometimes had to pay a lot more for the school transportation than originally budgeted for, sometimes leaving them with not enough money for school books.	The intermediary organisation asked these pupils to keep all receipts. This issue has been looked into by EFIL and the European Commission.
7	The mother of one of the pupils was over concerned about the well being of her daughter and wouldn't let her travel alone.	Both intermediary organisations were heavily involved in comforting the mother. The pupil herself had no problems. As a solution, the organisations agreed that the pupil would be picked up by her mother at the end of the stay, rather than travel home with the other pupils.
8	In Germany, without the knowledge of the intermediary organisation, three schools handed over all the finances to the sending parents.	The intermediary organisation worked on solving this issue and contacted all involved.

6.3.5 Communication & Information flow

#	Issue	Handling
1	In some schools, contact persons (teachers, headmasters) changed since launching the programme, hindering communication flows.	Contacts were made by intermediary organisations and the EFIL office, to minimize the effects on the programme of the personnel change.
2	The majority of the schools did not communicate with their partner schools to discuss programmes to be followed by the pupils, leaving some of the pupils with subjects and classes they were not happy with. Communication should have taken place prior to the departure of the pupils.	The intermediary organisations took over the task of communicating with both the sending and hosting schools, to settle the problem of allocation of classes to pupils.
3	A fair number of schools seemed to struggle when it came to managing a foreign pupil at school.	Intermediary organisations offered their experience and materials to the hosting and the sending schools, to support the teachers in guiding the participants during the

		exchange.
4	It proved difficult to reach the responsible Comenius teachers at the schools or someone who was knowledgeable about the project, making it difficult for the intermediary organisations to deal with problems. This is very important in case of an emergency.	Intermediary organisations tried to make schools aware of the importance of a permanent staff member, as first contact in the school for anything related to the Comenius project.
5	Teachers often did not seem aware of the project and the work involved, although they were nominated by the schools as experienced Comenius teachers.	Intermediary organisations communicated with schools and teachers to make them aware of the expectations and the ongoing activities related to the project.
6	The project required extra working effort from teachers involved. This was often referred to as reason for not being able to act in a fast and appropriate way when difficulties came up.	Intermediary organisations took on extra work to cover for the lack of time / interest / commitment from the Comenius teachers.
7	Several intermediary organisations received questions dealing with the issue of recognition of school grades. Schools asked for common regulations and even templates. Some sending schools complained because they set requirements for attending classes that were not in the curriculum of the hosting school.	Intermediary organisations tried to facilitate communication between the sending and hosting schools and acted as a mediating body.
8	A hosting school complained that their Comenius pupil had not attended many of his classes during the second five-week period of the trimester. It transpired that the pupil, originally hosted by a comprehensive school, also had been given the chance to take courses from a high school housed in the same building. He eventually refused to take any of the classes he did not like in the original school and chose to only attend the high school lessons.	The intermediary organisation intervened saying it was mandatory for the pupil to attend the school that his home school had a partnership with. The pupil still didn't understand and claimed no one ever told him what the project was about and that the intermediary organisation should not ruin his chances of taking the most academic advantage of his stay. He did not feel comfortable attending lessons given by his former host mother (the pupil changed family in October). The comprehensive school was very unhappy with this situation. The pupil then discussed his problems with his hosting school (the comprehensive school) and ended up attending most of their lessons and only one or two from the other school.

7. Evaluation of the exchange scheme

All participating sending schools (= grant beneficiaries) and pupils were asked to fill in a final report, to be submitted within three weeks after the return of the pupil to his/her home country. Upon receiving the final report EFIL paid out the balance of the grant. The hosting schools' experience was evaluated by the external evaluator (see section 8).

The final report consisted of open ended questions in combination with some quantifiable questions. Where quantifiable questions were offered, the respondent had the choice between 5 levels of appreciation: very good - good - neutral - bad - very bad (see Annex 9.2 for the template). Below we provide an overview of these evaluations.

7.1 Evaluation by the schools

7.1.1 Overall evaluation

Schools are overall very happy with the pilot project (92% of the schools rate the experience as good/very good, with only 1% being unsatisfied). They show an increased interest in doing a similar exchange with other pupils.

A better knowledge of other European cultures and a wider EU-orientation are mentioned as effects on the international character of the participating schools. As one school noted: *"Even the chance of only one pupil to travel abroad and to learn to know a new culture is useful for the whole school and contributes to the atmosphere of "internationality" at school."*

When asked if the school would recommend Comenius individual pupil mobility to other schools, 91% responded positive, because of the reasons listed below:

- it is worthwhile for pupils to learn about other countries and cultures;
- it makes pupils more open-minded and tolerant;
- *"It helps sustain the relations with (former) Comenius partners and gives pupils a safe way of experiencing foreign cultures; it also provides an equal opportunity to pupils to stay abroad regardless of the financial situation of their families."*

When asked if schools would like to send or host again, 80% answered positive, 3% answered negative.

Schools were also asked whether they thought the length of the exchange was appropriate. Of the schools that sent a pupil on a trimester exchange, 79% thought the length to be right, while 18% thought it should have lasted longer. 78% of the semester schools perceived six months as sufficient, 11% thought it was too short and 5% evaluated a semester as too long.

7.1.2 Cooperation with the partner school

Overall schools are happy (92%) with the cooperation with their partner/host school, although a small number of schools mentioned it was not always easy to communicate with their counterparts, and during the exchange there was little contact.

Almost all schools mentioned that the good cooperation was partly due to the fact that schools knew each other through their previous Comenius cooperation. For some schools the personal engagement of the contact persons was the key to success for the exercise, as there was little interest from other colleagues.

More intense cooperation with the host school, further encouragement for new projects and a potential for future exchanges on a private basis (group and individual) are mentioned as the main accomplishments in the contact with the partner school. An insight into a different educational system was also mentioned by a number of schools as a learning point.

In relation to the education provided by the host school, the following problems were mentioned:

- difficulties with the grading system in foreign schools; a number of schools suggest to introduce an overall scheme for crediting grades in schools across the EU;
- some curriculum issues, as it was not always clear which subjects the pupil could or had to follow to comply with the regulations in his/her home country;
- language difficulties.

Although one Austrian school mentioned "*it's language that counts, and this overrules all diverging curriculum matters*", it is obvious from the pilot that an alternative timetable for the hosted pupil is necessary, at least in the early weeks of the exchange. In a number of cases extra tasks or a specific project were given to the pupil as an alternative for certain classes.

7.1.3 Cooperation between the sending school and the pupils

The cooperation between the sending schools and their participating pupils has been rated quite high at 92%. Nevertheless, in quite a high number of cases there was no contact at all, since the pupil did not experience any problems and both parties did not feel the need to communicate. Where there was contact, it mainly happened through the exchange of e-mails. In a few cases a Comenius meeting took place during the pupil's stay, so teachers could have personal contact with the participant.

Schools have used several means to evaluate the pupil's experience after his/her return:

- questionnaires;
- informal talks with the pupil;
- evaluation meeting with the pupil and some teachers;
- class presentation by the pupil;
- school press article.

When asked how schools think the pilot project has affected the personal development of the pupil, schools responded the following:

- self-development;
- increased self-confidence and openness;
- increased self-reliance;
- increased language skills;
- increased intercultural skills.

7.1.4 Cooperation with the intermediary organisations

In general, schools are very satisfied with the overall cooperation of the intermediary organisations (AFS and YFU) (87% rating the cooperation as good/very good and only 1% appear unsatisfied). *"The shared responsibility and workload with AFS is an asset"*, a Belgian school wrote.

93% of the schools evaluated the practical arrangements made by the intermediary organisations as very good/good (6% were not satisfied).

Evaluation of the administrative cooperation

Schools specifically appreciated the help they received during the initial stages of the pilot when some things were still unclear and the timeframe was very short. One Finnish school wrote: *"Probably due to the pilot nature of the project, there were sometimes gaps of information, especially during the starting phase of the exchange. However, AFS was always very kind and helpful in all kinds of problems."*

A high number of schools specifically mention the need for administrative help in a future exchange scheme, as they felt overwhelmed with papers for this pilot. A few schools highlighted that a lot of different actors were involved which sometimes created a complex communication process.

Evaluation of the selection, the preparation and the support of the pupils

Only in two cases did schools feel that they would have done a better selection than the intermediary organisations (a Finnish school: *"I'm sure the teachers would have a better eye on selecting the pupils than AFS/YFU"*). However, when asked about the selection of the pupils, schools were generally very satisfied. Some schools even preferred not to intervene during the selection process. A German school noted: *"It was good that AFS decided which student would participate"*. Another school wrote: *"I think the purpose of these projects is not to send only model pupils but to give an equal opportunity to different kinds of interested pupils on the basis of teachers' recommendations."*

Overall schools were pleased with the preparation process of the pupils and felt that these activities helped the pupil to cope better with any possible integration problems. A number of schools would have liked to have been informed more specifically on the content of these training events by the intermediary organisations. Some schools thought the preparation process should have been longer and language classes should have taken place before departure.

Evaluation of the selection, the preparation and the support of the host families

The difficulties regarding the search for host families were mentioned several times, as well as the higher success rate with the intervention of the intermediary organisations. The preparation of the host families via workshops was also well perceived.

7.1.5 Recommendations made by the schools

Recommendations on the timeframe prior to the exchange

In general all schools had difficulties with the short timeframe and recommended a longer time span to allow more time to recruit interested pupils and identify potential host families.

There were some suggestions, mainly from Austrian schools, to have the exchange take place near the end of the year as this suited the local school system better. Some schools asked not to start the exchanges on the very first school day, as they are not able to give the host pupil a decent guidance on such a busy day.

Recommendation on the co-ordination of the exchanges

A large number of teachers appreciated the pilot a lot, but stated that it mounted to a lot of work for the exchange of just one single pupil. Teachers had to take on the coordination of this pilot on top of their regular work and no extra time or money was foreseen for this task. "*It is a lot of work if you add all the little tasks*", an Austrian teacher complained.

In Finland the whole process intervened with the summer holiday, which caused extra work for the teachers. "*The arrangements required from me additional effort due to the summer holiday period.*"

Recommendations on the administrative aspects of the exchange

Some schools have recommended that more specific guidelines should be drafted in the future and that the level of paperwork should be minimized. A French school stated that "*paperwork is less important than relationships in an efficient programme*".

A number of schools have asked to have all documents available in languages other than English and to be less strict with the procedures.

Recommendations on using the Comenius partnerships as a basis for the individual mobility scheme

Some schools questioned why the exchanges could not be opened to all Comenius schools, regardless of an existing partnership. A higher number of schools however think this project is better suited for existing Comenius partnerships. Some teachers even think an exchange should only happen after previous in-person contact between Comenius teachers of both schools

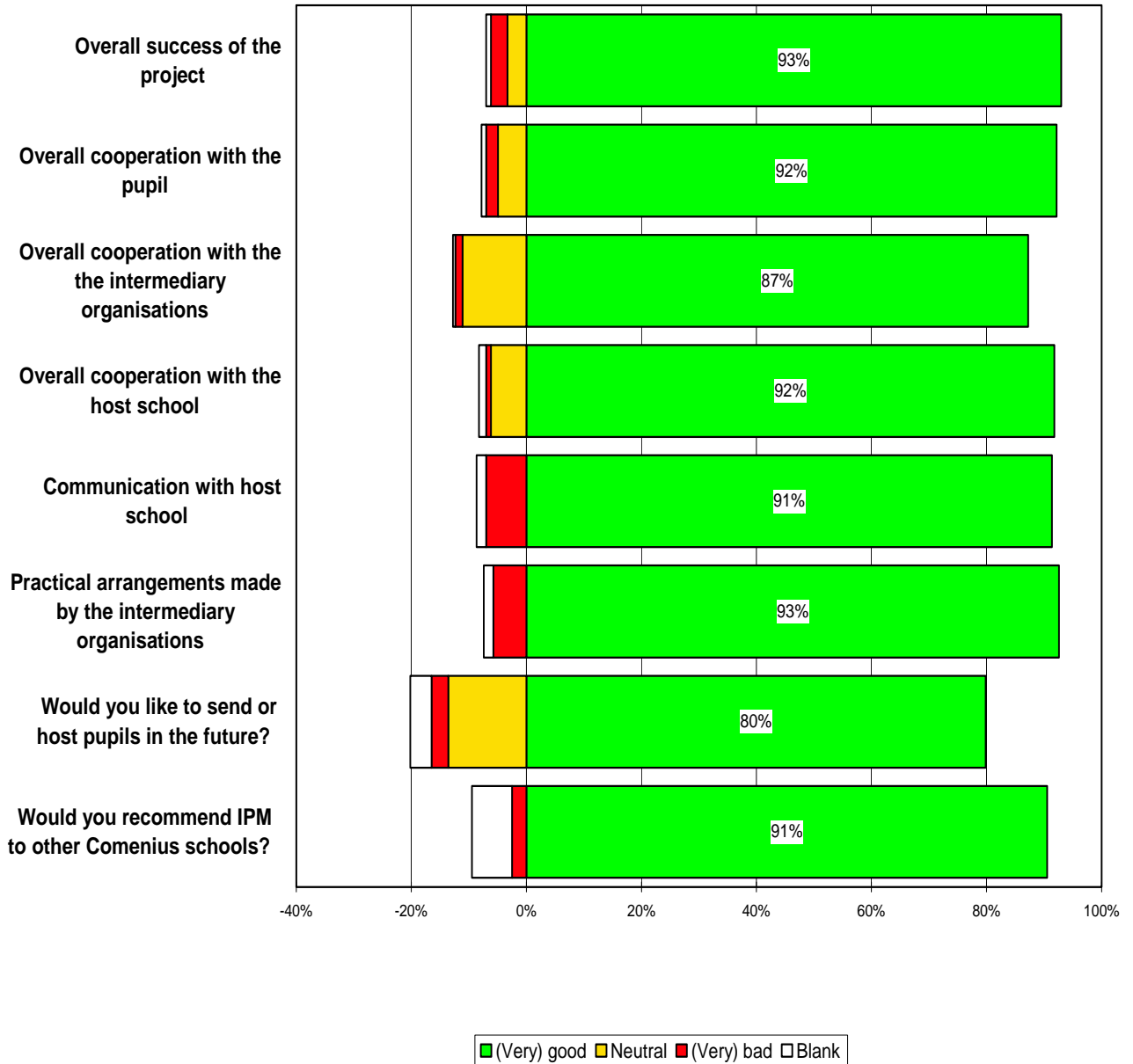
Recommendations on financial aspects

In general there were quite a few difficulties with the financial arrangements of the pilot. Some schools would have preferred that EFIL and the pupil/families had made bilateral financial arrangements without the involvement of the school.

Also a longer timeframe was suggested to give schools more time to deal with the financial aspects of the exchanges.

7.1.6 Statistics

Evaluation Comenius Individual Pupil Mobility Pilot Project (sending schools)



		(Very) good	Neutral	(Very) bad	Blank
1	Overall success of the project	93%	3%	3%	1%
2	Overall cooperation with the pupil	92%	5%	2%	1%
3	Overall cooperation with the national AFS or YFU organisation	87%	11%	1%	0%
4	Overall cooperation with the host school	92%	6%	1%	1%
5	Communication with host school	91%	0%	7%	2%
6	Practical arrangements by the national AFS-YFU organisation	93%	0%	6%	2%
		Yes	Maybe	No	Blank
7	Would you like to send or host pupils in the future?	80%	14%	3%	4%
8	Would you recommend IPM to other Comenius schools?	91%	0%	2%	7%
		Just right	Too short	Too long	Blank
9	Length of the exchange	79%	17%	1%	4%

7.2 Evaluation by the pupils

7.2.1 Overall evaluation

The pupils were asked what their expectations were when applying for this exchange. Below are the top five answers:

- (1) learn a new language;
- (2) meet new people/friends;
- (3) experience a different culture;
- (4) live with a nice host family;
- (5) become independent.

Overall 94% of the pupils were (very) satisfied with their experience, while only 1% were not satisfied. In general, pupils felt that their expectations were met during their time abroad.

51% of the trimester pupils considered the exchange too short, for the semester pupils this percentage was exactly the same. As a French pupil on the trimester programme wrote: "*The only regret I have is not having left for six months*". 44% of the trimester pupils evaluated the duration as just right, whereas 2% thought it to be too long. Of the semester pupils 41% considered the duration just right and 5% too long.

7.2.2 Evaluation of the academic experience

Most pupils enjoyed the experience of taking classes in a foreign school (78% positive and 16% neutral). However, many pupils commented on the problems regarding their curriculum. It proved difficult to find an agreement between the pupil, the host school and sending school on a common curriculum. This lay an extra burden on the pupil, who, in a number of cases, got homework from his/her sending school while following a regular curriculum in the host school. In one case the pupil had the use of a virtual classroom, where the math teacher of his sending schools uploaded assignments. The extra work from the home school (sending school) left the pupils with less quality time to integrate in the new environment (in school and with the host family), and in this way defeated the purpose of the intercultural experience through a school exchange.

It was suggested by a number of pupils that the host school should pay more attention to their host pupils during the first few days of the exchange. "*Some teachers didn't even know who I was on my first day at school*", a pupil from Germany wrote.

A large majority of the pupils stated that they learned a lot from experiencing a different school system, even if the language barrier did complicate matters in the beginning. Specific differences between their own school system and the school system in their host country were mentioned a couple of times: "*more/less homework*", "*a higher testing frequency*", "*smaller class groups*", "*more focus on human sciences*", "*more class hours a day*", etc.

Many pupils wrote that they did not stay in touch with their home school, although this was expected during the exchange. Most pupils mentioned there was no need to communicate with the home school, as there were no adaptation (or other) problems. The exchange of e-mail and the use of a blog were the main communication tools.

7.2.3 Evaluation of the host family experience

The satisfaction with the host family has been rated as positive by 84% of the participating pupils, with 12% recording neutral and 3% evaluating their stay with the host family as negative. In cases where a family change took place, pupils recommended that a better screening of the host family should take place in the future.

Most pupils stated that it took some time and energy before they adapted to a new family environment and that sometimes problems came up. But in most cases everything went smoothly in the end. "*At first it was a little hard to get used to a new family and country, but in the end it was so cool that I didn't even want to leave!*" – Finnish pupil

7.2.4 Evaluation of the training and support provided by the intermediary organisations

Trainings, support measures and preparatory meetings offered by the intermediary organisations in their home country were evaluated at a 77% positive rate, with 6% being negative.

Training and support offered in the host country were rated at 68% positive, 19% neutral and 12% negative. Language classes and intercultural workshops in the host country received a rating of 69% positive, 16% neutral and 9% negative.

Most pupils stated that they were able to learn a new language, although in a number of cases the pupil was not able to attend the language classes that were provided by the intermediary organisations. One pupil wrote: *"The best way to learn the language is to live with the host family and talk with them."*

Overall the pupils' ratings of the services offered by the intermediary organisations, although still quite high, are slightly less positive than the evaluations from their sending schools. This can partly be explained by the fact that the sending schools communicated almost exclusively about administrative issues. Pupils on the contrary were in contact with the organisations for issues dealing with support, intercultural adaptation and other 'sensitive' topics.

Although 74% of the pupils judged the payment and use of the monthly allowances as positive (16% neutral and 6% negative) a number of comments made by the pupils reflect their annoyance with the late payment of the allowances, in some cases no payment at all before the end of the programme. As mentioned before in this report, this was due to the tight time frame of the pilot. Schools signed and sent the financial agreements to EFIL very late, resulting in late payments to schools and thus late money transfers to their pupils.

7.2.5 Self-assessment of the pupils

In the pupils' evaluations it becomes very clear how high the impact of an exchange is on the personal development of the pupils. Without exception all pupils mentioned this as one of the major outcomes of their stay abroad. One Italian pupil wrote: *"I had good and bad experiences, but even the bad ones, I realised, were useful, because they made me grow!"*

Personality

All pupils mentioned one or more of the following as a (major) change in their personality:

- higher self-confidence;
- better self-knowledge;
- more tolerant towards other people and cultures;
- greater maturity;
- better adaptation skills in a new environment;
- more patience;
- more extrovert/less shy;
- more independent.

Perception of the host country

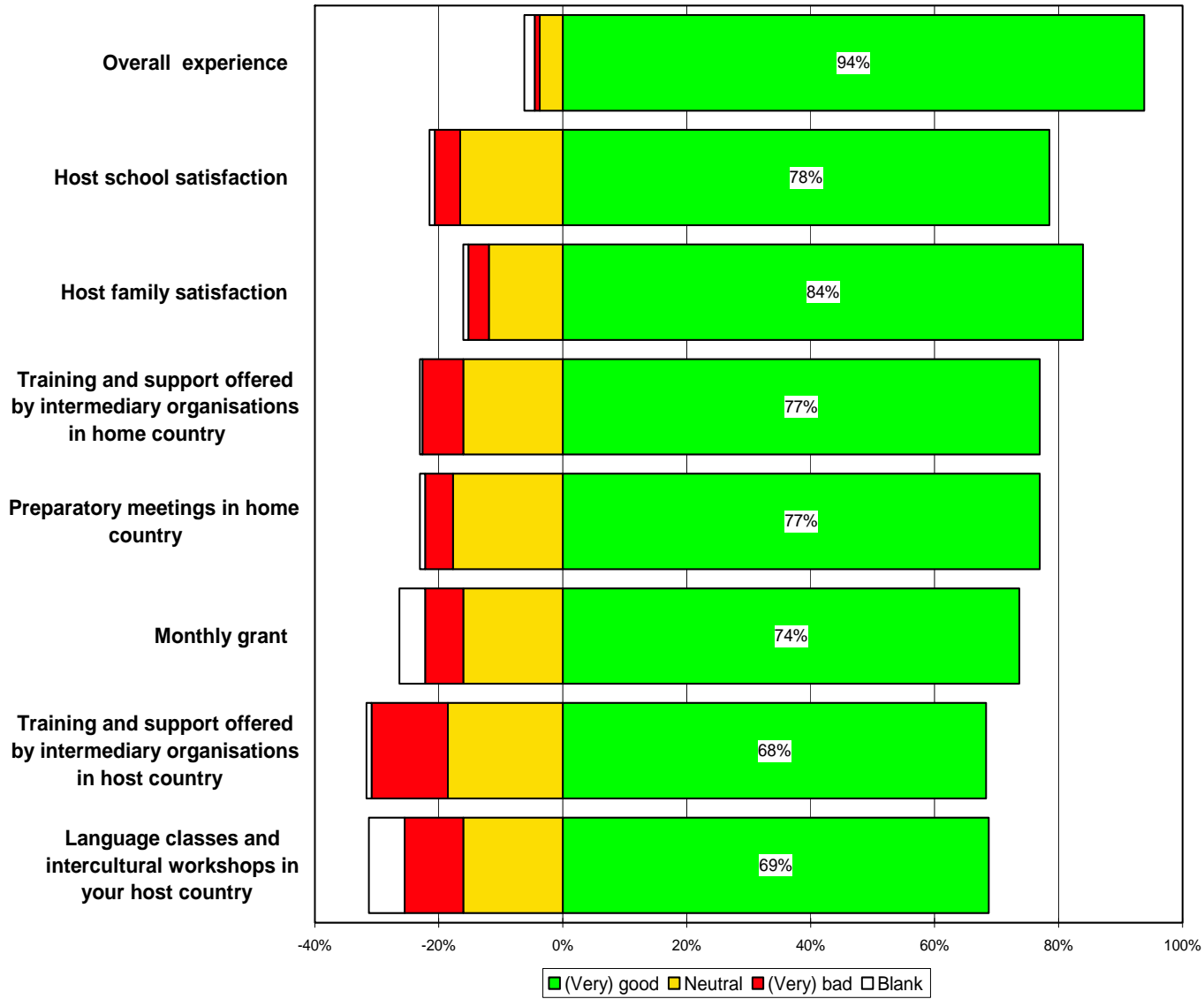
When asked about their perception of the host country, most pupils state a better understanding of the local culture and the experience of different traditions. A higher tolerance towards these differences is often mentioned too.

In most cases pupils were able to look beyond the existing stereotypes, whereas in other cases these stereotypes were confirmed. *"I saw that all stereotypes about the Italians are true. They all eat pasta almost once a day"*, a French pupil wrote.

Next to a better understanding of their host country, a better understanding of their own home country was written down quite often. Or, as a Finnish pupil wrote: *"I also started to question some things about my own culture."*

7.2.6 Statistics

Evaluation Comenius Individual Pupil Mobility Pilot Project (pupils)



		Satisfied	Neither	Unsatisfied	Blank
1	Overall experience	94%	4%	1%	2%
2	Host school satisfaction?	78%	16%	4%	1%
3	Host family satisfaction	84%	12%	3%	1%
4	Training and support offered by intermediary organisations in home country	77%	16%	7%	0%
7	Preparatory meetings in home country	77%	18%	5%	1%
5	Monthly grant	74%	16%	6%	4%
6	Training and support offered by intermediary organisations in host country	68%	19%	12%	1%
8	Language classes and intercultural workshops offered by intermediary organisations in host country	69%	16%	9%	6%
		Just right	Too short	Too long	Blank
9	Length of the exchange	44%	51%	3%	2%

8. External evaluation of the pilot project

Techne

**Evaluation of the
Comenius individual pupil mobility
pilot project**

May 28, 2008

Søren Kristensen, Ph.D
Techne

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i. EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

As part of the Comenius individual pupil mobility pilot project, a test phase involving the exchange of 294 pupils between 10 European countries was carried out from September 2007 to February 2008. This test phase was evaluated by an external evaluator, Dr. Søren Kristensen from Techne.

The external evaluation focused primarily on the exchange as a pedagogical tool, and looked at the interventions undertaken by the main actors (the intermediary organisations¹ and the schools) with a view to ensuring the quality (learning outcome) of the stay abroad. The main aims of the evaluation was to identify factors which had a negative impact on learning outcomes (barriers) as well as positive factors (examples of good practice). In connection with the latter, it was also an aim to assess their *transferability*; i.e. under which conditions they could be copied and used by other actors. Data for the evaluation was obtained from the main actors (intermediary organisations, sending and hosting schools) using a variety of methods (document analysis, participatory observation, questionnaire surveys and qualitative interviews).

The criteria used in the evaluation were derived from a theoretical framework which operationalised learning theory in a context of educational stays abroad. These stays (“exchanges”) are seen as systems involving activities before (recruitment/motivation, selection and preparation), during (monitoring, mentoring) and after (evaluation, recognition, perspectivation, retention and reintegration). The preparation element is further subdivided into linguistic, cultural, practical, pedagogical and psychological preparation. In addition to the pedagogical criteria, the evaluation also investigated a number of practical issues in relation to the exchange, notably accommodation, travel arrangements, grant management, insurance, liability, information flows and organisational aspects. For each of these criteria, data was extracted and assessed in order to reach conclusions, which could be used as recommendations for future individual long-term exchanges in the Comenius programme.

Specifically in relation to the pilot project, the evaluation identified the short deadlines as a major problem. Schools had been given too little time to react, and this affected in particular selection and preparation, with knock-on effects later. In a more general perspective, the lack

¹ The term “intermediary organisations” is used to denote AFS and YFU, the two exchange organisations which were responsibly for implementing the pilot project at national level in the 10 participating countries.

of recognition procedures was the main negative factor. Participating pupils were in many cases forced to follow a “double curriculum”, where they struggled to adapt to the host environment and the academic requirements here, and at the same time were obliged to keep up with the curriculum in their home school. This generated a lot of stress. The cause was partly the failure of sending and hosting schools to agree on joint learning agreements for the pupils, which could tackle the issue in a practical manner; and partly the inflexibility of school systems, which did not allow for more individualised learning trajectories. There were also indications that international activities were not really a strategic issue for schools, and were the responsibility of dedicated individuals rather than an organisational priority.

In terms of positive factors (“examples of good practice”), the evaluation identified a number of these, but points out that a closer scrutiny is needed to uncover and describe all. Whereas it is perfectly possible to copy and emulate the majority, the evaluation concludes that there is a major challenge in making all actors adhere to a shared set of quality criteria in the future. In the pilot project, the intermediary organisations were responsible (wholly or in part) for all pedagogical and practical arrangements, with the exception of learning agreements and recognition, and were consequently in a position to impose their own quality criteria, which were shared by national organisations in all 10 countries. In a future scenario, where schools (and National Agencies) may take a more prominent role, differences in perception, understanding and priorities may become a lot more pronounced. This may in turn lead to problems of maintaining an adequate quality, as the individual elements in the quality assurance system need to be in balance with one another. Lacunae in the provision of e.g. preparation will affect the overall quality of the activity, even though the other elements are carried out in a satisfactory manner. Attention must therefore first and foremost be paid to the quality assurance system as such, rather than to individual tools and practices.

ii. DECLARATION

I have carried out the evaluation according to the standards of good evaluation practice and to the best of my abilities. I deem the resources allocated to the evaluation sufficient. Aims and methodology have been agreed beforehand with the commissioning agent (EFIL), but data collection and analysis of data has been carried out with no interference from any of the actors and stakeholders involved. All conclusions and recommendations are anchored in the empirical material, but the formulation has been my sole responsibility.

Copenhagen, May 28, 2008

Søren Kristensen, Ph.D.
External evaluator

