

**External Evaluation of the European
Centre for the Development of Vocational
Training (Cedefop)**
Consolidated Final Report

External Evaluation of the European Centre for the Development of Vocational Training (Cedefop)

Consolidated Final Report

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Executive Summary

Introduction

This final report presents the findings from the external interim evaluation of the EU's Centre for the Development of Vocational Training (Cedefop) and covers the period from 2001 to 2006. It was conducted by ECOTEC Research & Consulting Ltd under contract to the European Commission's Directorate-General Education and Culture from December 2006 to December 2007.

Aims and objectives of Cedefop

Cedefop was set up in 1975 with an overall remit to:

- *“assist the Commission in encouraging at Community level, the promotion and development of vocational training and of in-service training”;*
 - *“contribute, through its scientific and technical activities, to the implementation of a common vocational training policy”;*
 - *“encourage the exchange of information and the comparison of experience”*
- (Regulation 337/75, Article 2.1)

These objectives are clearly broadly drawn and – partly for this reason – have stood the test of time. The founding Regulation also called on the organisation to:

- *Document vocational training;*
 - *Contribute to the development and coordination of research on vocational training;*
 - *Disseminate all useful documentation and information;*
 - *Support concerted approach to vocational training problems with specific view on mutual recognition of vocational training;*
 - *Provide a forum for all those concerned;*
- (Regulation 337/75, Article 2.2)

Again, these goals still provide the rationale for Cedefop's activities today. However, for the purposes of the evaluation, it was necessary to establish the sets of objectives which had governed its work over the most recent period and in order to do this an intervention logic was constructed which is shown in the figure below. This provided the primary lens through which the evaluation was conducted.

The Intervention Logic for Cedefop 2001-2006



Evaluation framework

In order to evaluate Cedefop against these aims and objectives a series of evaluation questions was employed. The main topics addressed were as follows:

Relevance and complementarity: To what extent are the Centre's objectives relevant in relation to the evolving needs and priorities at national and EU level? To what extent do Cedefop's objectives and activities complement those of other public or private national, international or private organisations or bodies?

Effectiveness and added value: How far has the programme contributed to achieving its specific and operational objectives? To what extent does delegating activities to Cedefop provide added value?

Efficiency: How were the resources (inputs) turned into outputs or results? Are the organisation's organisational, budgetary and governance regimes configured robustly enough to contribute to the effectiveness and efficiency of its operations?

Utility: Did the programme have an impact on the target groups or populations in relation to their needs?

Alongside these 'standard' evaluation questions, it became clear during the early stages of the evaluation that there were also a number of critical strategic issues concerned with Cedefop's broad role to be addressed under these headings. Indeed, these became of vital importance in understanding the choices Cedefop had been making and are reflected in our conclusions and recommendations.

Methodology

In order to formulate answers to these questions a methodology was devised comprised of the following elements:

Two web surveys: the 'user' web survey of individual practitioners, researchers and policymakers which registered 593 responses (a 9.1% response rate); and a survey of Intermediary Bodies working with Cedefop (the Study Visit National Liaison Officers, members of the Teachers and Trainers Network, National ReferNet Coordinators, and National Europass Centres) which achieved 67 responses (a 48% response rate).

Interviews with: 18 members of the Cedefop Governing Board and Bureau; 15 representatives of the key institutional partners of Cedefop; 24 Cedefop Staff members at directorate, head of unit and head of services level; 12 individual practitioners, policy makers and researchers who had replied to the online survey of users; and another 12 representatives of Intermediary Bodies working with Cedefop.

Two Focus Groups were convened at Cedefop at the mid-point of the evaluation, one with 8 members of the Cedefop Governing Bureau and another with 8 staff members ranging from experts to secretaries.

Four In-depth Case Studies were carried out in order to explore in detail certain activities that Cedefop considered to be strategic and relevant to its developing roles: ReferNet, Skillsnet, the Study Visits Programme, and Policy Reporting for the Copenhagen Process.

The conclusions of the evaluation have emerged from the evidence gathered through these different evaluation components and should be considered in light of the limitations stemming from the finite number of views that it has been possible to consider and the finite evaluation resources available.

Evaluation conclusions

The strategic issues: objectives, priorities and constraints

In relation to its overall objectives, it was possible to conclude from the process of reconstructing the agency's intervention logic that in delivering the mission given to it under the terms of the 1975 Founding Regulation, Cedefop had pursued a *logical and structured approach*. It was also evident that while it is possible to identify a *clear and internally coherent strategy* underpinning the objectives and actions, their range and complexity remains considerable. We also concluded that its overall role - and the pre-eminent ethos that had guided its actions over the first 25 years of its existence - was to act as an 'open source' for VET information and intelligence.

At the same time, an important point of departure for the evaluation was to place Cedefop in its proper operating context in order to understand what it seeks to do and the extent to which it has been successful in its goals. This was particularly important as the period from 2001 to 2006 had been a time of intense and significant change in the development of the EU VET field. During this period VET had moved up the overall economic and social agenda of the EU to the point at which it became clearly recognised as a key tool in the development of human capital and in the alleviation of social disadvantage. As part and parcel of this the European VET community became more coherent, more focussed and more strategic, adopting the Copenhagen process as a key part of the development of policy and practice. Enlargement also had a profound over-arching impact. On top of all this, the Lisbon process fundamentally re-engineered the way in which the key roles in policy learning and policy practice were distributed between the EU institutions and the Member States and regions.

To tackle these far-reaching changes, Cedefop has sought to develop a role in supporting the development of VET policy and its implementation which has emerged to sit alongside its 'open source' function as one of the organisation's key strategic functions. The conclusion from the evaluation is that this represents a critical point in not just the evaluation period but in the history of the agency.

At the same time, Cedefop has clearly faced some important constraints in seeking to take on new challenges. With the mandate given to it by the 1975 Founding Regulation and its stand-alone status as the European Agency dedicated to VET policy and practice,

Cedefop has the prospect of long-term funding support and of resources sufficient to give it the status of a major player. But since this resource is public funding under a European Parliament budget line, this means a close emphasis on regulation and rule compliance which has had a critical influence on how it has been able to respond to new challenges. For the Governing Board and senior management this has meant trying to steer the organisation to meet new demands whilst continuing to meet the legitimate claims of its very broad and diverse base of stakeholders and users. It has also meant having to work with a flat line of real available resources and a one-year planning horizon, at a time of significantly rising demand, not least from enlargement which overnight almost doubled its core 'customer' base. What is plain throughout the evaluation is the picture of an organisation striving to meet fast-changing conditions but finding it challenging to change course and shift its focus; the metaphor of "turning the tanker" is an appropriate one.

Cedefop is thus at a strategic crossroads with choices to be made. In strategic terms, it is the conclusion of the evaluation that in developing its policy supporting role Cedefop has taken an important step forwards into an area where it can make the most of its unique position for the benefit of its stakeholders and where it can add significant value. At the same time, in an environment of flat-line funding, bringing new activities forward means removing others or continuing to spread resources ever more thinly over an ever widening base. It also means trying to please everyone or deciding to give priority to one set of user and stakeholder needs over another.

The previous interim evaluation concluded that the Centre was trying to do too much, often being unable to set "negative priorities". We believe that there is still an argument that Cedefop is trying strategically to do too much, although output measures show that it is probably managing to succeed in doing so, sometimes against the odds. However, some strategic realignment is now necessary in its activities and the agency needs to communicate its priorities to its users and stakeholders to make clear its position. We conclude that continuing trying to meet the needs of all its users all of the time poses too high a risk that the organisation will end up meeting the needs of no-one satisfactorily.

Some form of prioritisation should be made on the basis of Cedefop's strengths and weaknesses. The agency should especially emphasize those activities that meet an identified need. The report gives some indications of activities that Cedefop is uniquely placed to fill, such as for example the Skillsnet activities in the field of research or the work on the Maastricht and Helsinki reports to support policy implementation. Moreover, the process of deciding Cedefop's medium-term priorities (MTPs) 2009-2011 offers an opportunity to review priorities and provide a new strategic balance for Cedefop.

Relevance and complementarity

In terms of relevance and complementarity the evaluation considered three main questions: how well positioned was Cedefop in relation to the evolving needs of the wider user community; how well was it perceived as meeting those needs; and whether it was complementing or duplicating the work of other bodies. In relation to the question of changing needs, the overall impression we gained from the user community at large – both individual users and intermediary bodies - was that they saw Cedefop in a very favourable light. By and large it was seen as relevant and "doing a good job" for them whatever their role or function. The brand was well regarded.

Equally we found that users had very different views on what they valued most within the overall portfolio of activities. The bulk of the users told us that they were still most happy with Cedefop playing its established role as an open-source reference centre for VET. The responses were slightly more muted when it came to supporting policy development and implementation and providing independent technical advice. What the evidence on relevance does show is that there is strong support for having Cedefop play both roles in concert. At the same time, we found users to be perceiving Cedefop to be playing a complementary role with other agencies, and also found evidence of Cedefop being aware of the need to guard against duplication and taking active steps to be clear as to respective functions. Looking to the future, and given the emergence of Cedefop's dual role, this boundary terrain with other agencies will continue to require active management. More generally, in the case of both relevance and complementarity the issue that still remains to be confronted in the future is: what is the right balance between Cedefop's two main roles?

Effectiveness

In looking at how well Cedefop has achieved its objectives it was necessary to construct a set of consolidated objectives that could cover a period of changing priorities and also reflect how Cedefop organises itself internally to deliver them. For the consolidated objective for *information, communication and dissemination* the story that emerged was for general overall effectiveness. This, of course, accords with the agency's role in continuing to serve as the key reference centre for EU VET. There was some concern about the multiplicity of the web sites that presented the agency to the outside world and about design and access. But in general we found no significant weight of critical opinion about the way this cluster of operational activities was carried out over the 2001-2006 period. Indeed, the bulk of the user response was couched in terms of being "positive" or "very positive" about what was being done. Respondents were, however, wanting to suggest improvements in the way various aspects of these activities were carried out.

In looking at examples of the allocation of resources to particular actions, the case study of ReferNet showed this to be a well-found concept but we detected a feeling that much more needs to be done to unlock its true potential. Some 60% of ReferNet Consortia respondents felt that 'collecting and analysing VET-related information at EU level' should be 'modified' and we took it that this response indicated concerns about the way things are currently organised. What we can, however, say with some confidence about this cluster of reference centre based objectives is that the sheer volume and breadth of the information and intelligence material (in the widest sense) that "hubs though" and is analysed by Cedefop is impressive and is a strong element in the value added impact of the agency on the way VET has developed in the EU.

In the same vein, Cedefop's exchange and cooperation activities are clearly seen by the users we have canvassed as highly effective in helping it deliver its overall mission. We looked closely at the Study Visits programme and found strong evidence of it being successfully run and highly valued over many years – despite limited funding. It was especially highly valued by participants from the New Member States - with high participation rates during the first 12 months of EU enlargement – but there are issues about spreading resources too thinly as new demands arise without the investment to support them. With respect to our closer look at Virtual Communities, however, we found it much more difficult to come to a view. The idea of using new technologies cost-efficiently to maintain dialogue across a widely dispersed and thematically segmented user group is in theory a sound proposition. But, consistent with what commentators in general say about "virtual" communities, we found it difficult to capture a measure of the real benefits. This consolidated objective emerges as one of the headline sources of value added for Cedefop – providing a "space" for dialogue. The users we canvassed wanted more of this sort of activity.

The bundle of activities under the heading of the consolidated objective of research, advice and policy support are diverse and reflect the different ways in which the organisation tries to realise its objectives. What we found was that Cedefop was able to be effective in a variety of modus operandi. Looking at Europass, Cedefop had the credibility to be given the task of hosting, monitoring and developing the key tools and achieving an effective launch. With Skillsnet it leveraged in significant external resources successfully to fill a knowledge gap. When we looked in detail at Cedefop's contribution to Helsinki we saw it as having been effective in taking on a task of great breadth and complexity with few resources. For *Zooming in on 2010* and the activities that took place around it, we could see Cedefop beginning to realise the strategic shift away from its traditional 'open source' function and play a key role in supporting policy implementation.

Value added and impact

The weight of the evidence is that Cedefop represents an organisation with a *very distinct added value*. There are simply no valid alternatives at the moment for what it does and over many of its actions it has no obvious peer. No other organisation has a dedicated focus on VET and a Europe-wide pool of experience and competency applied to the field. Indeed, there is a strong argument that if Cedefop did not exist an organisation that looks something like it would probably have to be invented. This endows the organisation with a heavy weight of responsibility and makes it doubly important that, in the face of fixed resources, it judges where best to apply its special added value. Such a monopoly position can be a source of weakness if it leaves the organisation unable clearly to define and set out its priorities and fosters a climate of complacency. We are happy to report that at the time of writing this is not the case and what we have seen in the last two years is an active attempt to think through the role of the agency and to set out on a clear future path.

There are a number of areas where it is clear that Cedefop has been able to have positive effects and bring added value. These types of activity represent key strengths of the organisation. They are:

- Synthesising material on VET, pulling together available research and applying it to the situation in Europe in order to interpret what is going on across Member States;
- Being able to host and refine tools to support the implementation of policy such as Europass
- Filling knowledge gaps, as in the case of Skillsnet
- Providing a space where people in the VET field can come together to discuss key points – particularly linking together practitioners and researchers; and
- Supporting the Copenhagen process through – *inter alia*- the production of reports for Maastricht and Helsinki which have been generally well received and which have helped to shape the debate.

Efficiency

While it was relatively easy to set out some clear views on value added, relevance and effectiveness, the task of assessing efficiency proved to be far more difficult. Measuring efficiency requires a look at how resource inputs were transformed into activity outputs and some estimation of value for money and comparative costs with other methods of provision or other providers. We have tried to do this but have not been able to achieve an acceptable outcome. Data on efficiency (actual spend per unit output) per activity were required but for the years covered by the study we were faced with very little useable information concerning overall *actual* spend by activity. Activity based *budgeting* was a

requirement of the Internal Audit Service and was beginning to be implemented after the timeframe for the study but for our purposes it came too late. A particular difficulty we faced was to determine the *actual* labour cost input per activity. The system in place was essentially budget-driven with numbers of full-time equivalent staff assigned to activities within each of the organisation's operating Areas and broad variances logged. Looking for output measures we were also frustrated. Measured performance indicators were only comprehensively available for the first time in 2005 and it was possible only to make partial comparability observations between 2005 and 2006. We are happy to report that some of these issues are now being taken on board by the current management team.

Not all was lost, however. By using some available proxy measures we have been able to illustrate – from the output side - something of the weight of things Cedefop achieved over the study period. As a matter of simple observation, the scale of activity has been simply enormous. Furthermore, from what we know about flat funding and from what we can see as trends in the quantity of general output, all the signs are that in the ratio of inputs to outputs Cedefop can lay good claim to be considered as efficient, although we stress that it has not been possible to measure this scientifically.

Recommendations

On the basis of the foregoing conclusions, a number of recommendations are made. Here we summarise the main ones.

Strategic Issues

- Cedefop should use the opportunity presented by the need to formulate its Medium Term Priorities for 2009-11 to address the strategic balance in its operations between open source provision on the one hand and the policy support function on the other.
- It should adopt a clear strategy to promote the recognition across its entire constituency that it has *two* specific objectives – *to provide support as a reference centre for VET issues; and to contribute to and support the implementation of the EU VET policy priorities.*
- As part of this the agency should continue to search creatively for ways to reduce the breadth of its activities, and to focus its resources on a smaller number of core activities. Active consideration should continue to be given to deleting elements of the activity portfolio that (even though successful on their own terms) make it more difficult to achieve a balance between its two specific objectives.

- Direct action should be taken to bring the issues before the wide constituency of users, to consult them and to solicit their assistance either in finding the necessary additional resources or in making the choices more acceptable.
- To support Cedefop to implement these recommendations the European Commission should help the agency to explore ways to enable it to respond more flexibly to the strategic demands placed upon it. It should also explore with the relevant European services and institutions how it might be possible within the Regulations to give Cedefop a longer-term planning horizon for its actions.

Operational Issue

The report makes a number of recommendations with respect to operational matters, some of a general nature and others more specific to particular activities, reflecting the coverage of the evaluation methodology.

- Cedefop should conduct a review of strategy of information and communication services to target the information needs of specific groups of stakeholders who use different types and format of information. This should include such elements as a publications strategy for key decision makers and a fundamental review of the web sites.
- The agency should carry out a critical assessment of the outputs and activities requested from ReferNet on the basis of the budget available, including a review of activities undertaken by the network, an on-going assessment of performance, and the development of more interaction between ReferNet consortia from different countries.
- Means should be sought to extend and develop the Study Visits programme as a platform for the identification, dissemination and exchange of good practice in VET across the EU, not least so that it can be used as a strategic resource within Cedefop that is systematically linked to other activity areas.
- Cedefop should establish a clear position for itself at the nexus of policy and research, emphasising its unique role as a synthesiser and applier of the latest research to EU VET problems – a role which it communicates to its users and stakeholders. It should also seek to produce more concise, timely and better focused outputs particularly dedicated to the needs of policy makers.

- Finally it should use the platform it has developed through policy reporting to begin to develop a 'foresight' process on behalf of VET stakeholders in Europe, which would include pulling together a team of external experts to look beyond 2010.

Internal Management Issues

Although we were given an early steer to concentrate the evaluation less on internal management matters than those to do with strategy and operations, a number of recommendations are made in relation to issues that had an effect on the evaluation process:

- An approach to activity-based financial *reporting* needs to complement the system for activity-based budgeting which will be used in 2008 for the first time. This will enable Cedefop to assess accurately the actual resources applied to activities (as opposed to those *budgeted* for) and will assist the making of strategic choices between activities.
- There is a need to develop more the evaluation culture within Cedefop. As a step in this direction, measures for value for money and for effectiveness (unit costs, comparative cost analysis) need to be developed and implemented.

1.0 Introduction - methodological approach

1.1 The Approach to the Final Report

What follows is the final report for the Interim Evaluation of Cedefop under the EU requirement for the evaluation of operations and programmes. It has been preceded by an Inception Report and by an Interim Report produced during the course of the work and in accordance with agreed deliverables for the contract.

There are at least two approaches to final reporting for evaluations such as the one here. On the one hand, there is a report characterised by the weight and density of the material presented and where there is an attempt to set out all the necessary elements of

the standard evaluation model. There are clear benefits to this in the completeness of the document and the availability of all the evidence collected during the course of the work. There is also a penalty. Such a report is by its nature likely to be a work of reference rather than a readable exposition of the most significant findings. On the other hand, there is a report that attempts to achieve succinctness and readability and that attempts to set out the key questions that need to be asked and to offer short answers to them. Here too there is a penalty. Not everything collected in the work programme is made available and some issues are downplayed while others are deliberately given prominence.

In the report that follows we have chosen chiefly to follow the second route – readability over comprehensiveness. We believe that after almost a year's work the key questions that need to be explored in relation to the activities of Cedefop over the past six years have become clear and are largely accepted by the parties to the evaluation – Cedefop itself, DGEAC as the client and ECOTEC as the contractor. These questions can and will be captured through the lens of the standard DG Budget recommended methodology and glossary for EU evaluation studies. We feel, however, that to structure the report that follows strictly in accordance with the received logic for evaluation will see us miss the opportunity to "tell a story" – one that will both achieve the requirements for evaluation and be readable to a wide audience.

Our approach in what follows will be to allow the logics and terms of evaluation methodology to be identified as we pass through the text – using boxes and flags to point this up – but that the shape of the discourse will be set by the questions for and about Cedefop that need to be answered. We have conducted the work in accordance with the terms of the brief as a formative and largely sympathetic exercise – looking to share and to learn with Cedefop as the subject for the evaluation as we have gone along but equally

willing to play the role of "critical friend" – not being shy to criticise where the evidence justifies it but always seeking to be constructive.

1.2 The Evaluation Brief

The brief for the evaluation is set out in detail in the evaluation's Inception Report. What we have been commissioned to do is to carry out an Interim Evaluation covering the period 2001-2006. Two salient pointers in the brief as set out are; first the one we have just explored – that it should be a *formative evaluation*. The features of the formative approach are regarded as the following:

- Seeking Improvement;
- Usually done over stages;
- Evaluator as co-learner – arbitrator;
- Used to give feedback, identify strengths and weaknesses, develop plans;

To some extent we have also been required to be *judgemental* (or in some parts of the literature "summative"). This implies the following:

- Making a judgement – did it work, did it pass
- Usually done at an interim and end-point;
- Evaluator as auditor, judge, scorer;
- Used to grade, score or rank the subject;

In what follows it will be possible to see elements of both approaches but we have been careful only to be judgemental where there is evidence to back it up that we can be relatively confident about. The brief is then sensitive to the needs of Cedefop to be party to the process, to be fairly judged and to be offered constructive assistance through a process of mutual engagement and learning.

A further "steer" from the brief is the need to have a strong focus on the *external effectiveness* of Cedefop, the purpose of such an evaluation not being to look at the implementation of internal procedures. This we have done but we have also been driven by the requirements of evaluation practice to look at some aspects of the internal operation and efficiency of the organisation. We have been made aware of some of the internal challenges being faced by Cedefop during the course of our evaluation (for instance, the ongoing controls of the Internal Audit Service) and have not sought either to engage with this or – in the light of its ongoing nature – to factor it into the evaluation one

way or the other. Our aim throughout, while of course to meet the brief as closely as we can, has been to offer ourselves as an independent outside voice; on the one hand to assist the client (DGEAC) to come to the judgements it needs to make on the basis of our evaluation findings but, on the other, to assist Cedefop get some kind of external referents for what it has been setting out to achieve and how it has organised itself to meet its objectives.

1.3 The Critical Questions for the Evaluation

Framing what has just been said in the language of formal evaluation the key components of the terms of reference for the work can be extracted as follows:

- Assessment of relevance, efficiency and effectiveness of activities and organisation in achieving key objectives, priorities and tasks;
- Provision of useful lessons and recommendations, in particular to improve the;
- Programming and management of the Centre;
- Performance and impacts of products and services;
- Accountability to the Budgetary Authority and the public at large;

The task before us is, nevertheless, to answer some relatively straightforward questions. Put at their simplest they boil down to: how well is Cedefop responding to the real needs of the wide community of interest it was set up to serve; how effective has it been in doing the right things in the right way to meet those needs; and how cost-effectively has it carried out the objectives it set for itself. Of course, there are a myriad of supplementary questions that go into finding the answers but the essence of the task is clear – how relevant, effective and efficient has it been in delivering the mission it was established to carry out. Once we have a view on these issues the brief requires us to go on to make some positive recommendations in the three areas identified.

As we set out in Annexe One, it is a feature of the language of evaluation that terms such as efficiency, effectiveness (as well as relevance, complementarity, impact, utility and so on) have more than the meaning ascribed in normal usage. These essentially technical terms have a particular logic in the context of the EU evaluation model and it is in this sense that they are used in the report that follows. We also have at our disposal an accepted way of conducting an EU evaluation study. This is the DG Budget Evaluation Framework and we have applied it as the basic guide to the work we have carried out. We shall not deflect ourselves by introducing it in detail here since, as we said earlier, our aim is readability over detail and comprehensiveness.

1.4 The Methodology for the Evaluation

The methodology for the evaluation was set out in the original offer to the client and was refined at the Inception stage of the work programme. The Inception Report gives a comprehensive account of the evaluation grid, the research questions and the survey approach. We have set much of this out in Annexes Two and Three but it will be helpful here to give a brief summary of what was involved.

We have, as we have just said, followed the prescribed method and terminology for evaluation under the DG Budget Guidelines¹. In doing this we have brought together a comprehensive assemblage of evidence from the literature, from web searches, from documentation and from a number of survey activities. To support our observations we have captured the views of over 100 key informants through interviews and more than 650 respondents in two web surveys. The details of the survey elements, their populations and issues concerning response rates and the validity of the data are set out in detail in the Interim Report for the study.

For the purposes of this final report it will be sufficient to give only the broadest outline of the work that has been done – not least so that the reader can be aware of the nature of the sources of information underpinning Chapters 4, 5 and 6. The work programme consisted of a series of activities under the following general headings:

User Web Survey

The aim was to draw on the views of individual practitioners, researchers and policymakers who make use of Cedefop services - gathering basic information about the respondents and also capturing their opinion of the Centre and its activities.

The invitation to complete the user web survey was sent by Cedefop to a total of 7553 e-mail addresses (made up of 3586 "virtual communities" subscribers, 3336 ETV newsletter subscribers and 361 members of the ERO-Call database). 593 valid responses were received in response (486 in English, 50 in French and 57 in German). Taking into account only the number of bounce backs and duplicate addresses, the response rate was 9.1% (593 responses out of 6573 "realistic" users). The evaluation undertook an analysis of the population invited to respond compared to the responses received. This analysis is described in detail in the interim report of the evaluation and found that both the population and the responses received had a reasonable spread across the countries of the EU and that ranged across a good spectrum of potential user groupings, hence we can be

¹ 'Evaluating EU Activities: A practical guide for the Commission services', European Commission, Directorate General for the Budget, July 2004

relatively comfortable that when we come to report the survey findings there is a fair representation of those who would help us to form a view of Cedefop.

Intermediary Bodies Web Survey

This was designed to capture the views of "intermediary bodies" (IBs) working with Cedefop as follows: Study Visit National Liaison Officers (NLOs) and Technical Support Agents (TSAs), Members of the Teachers and Trainers Network (TTNet), National ReferNet Coordinators, and National Europass Centres. The expectation from this web survey was to capture the views of these organisations who are external to Cedefop but who also have a good understanding of specific Cedefop activities and who have regular contact and cooperation with the Centre. The expectation was that these organisations would be particularly familiar with specific Cedefop activities and could offer informed views on a number of evaluation issues. Many of the IB survey questions were common with the user web survey questions and the survey also contained additional questions to assess IB perceptions on their interaction with Cedefop. Unfortunately, responsiveness to this survey was low and we had to resort to a series of reminders to increase the response rate.

The responses received to the IB survey (at the point when it was decided to close the survey in order to take account of its results in time for drafting the final report) are described in the Table below.

IB Survey Responses

Type of IB organisation	Population invited to respond to the survey	Responses Received
LEONARDO DA VINCI National Liaison Office (NLO)/ Technical Assistance for the Study Visits Programme (TSAs) ²	30 NLOs (email invitation sent out by Cedefop on 15 &16 May) 25 TSAs (email invitation sent out by Cedefop on 5th of June)	14 NLOs 9 TSAs
Europass Centres	35 organisations (email invitation sent out by Cedefop on 15 &16 May)	10
Refernet Correspondents	27	12
TTNet members	There are 22 national TT networks.	20
TOTAL	139	67

² TSAs are individuals or agencies that assist NLOs in some countries in implementing the study visits

This gave a response rate of 48% (67 responses out of 139 invitees). However, when analysing the responses, it transpired that only three of the responses from National Europass Centres were completed in full. For the remaining ones, the majority of questions were incomplete. For this reason, we have not made reference to the responses of the Europass Centres as a group. We have only taken into account the three valid responses when analysing the aggregated responses to the survey.

Moreover, even if the overall response rate of 48% appears satisfactory, the absolute number of responses received for the other groups of intermediary bodies is limited to 23 NLOs/TSAs, 12 ReferNet coordinators and 20 TNet members. This important limitation has to be kept in mind when the reader considers our reporting of the IB survey responses.

Interviews

18 interviews were carried out with members of the Cedefop Governing Board and Bureau and another 15 interviews were carried out with representatives of the key institutional partners of Cedefop (including one MEP, a number of Commission Officials, and one representative each from the OECD, ETF and Eurydice). We were also unable to obtain a view from Eurostat despite repeated contact attempts. The interviews with Cedefop Board and Bureau members and with Commission officials (as well as interviews with the Cedefop directorate and Acting Heads of Areas) held at the start of the evaluation focused on reconstructing the intervention logic of Cedefop and Cedefop's strategic positioning. Subsequent Board and Bureau interviews were comprehensive, covering issues under all the key evaluation themes. Interviews with other key institutional partners of Cedefop focused on the complementarity and visibility of Cedefop activities.

In addition to the above 33 interviews, further viewpoints were gathered through:

- Interviews with 24 Cedefop Staff members at directorate, head of unit and head of services level as well as with Cedefop staff members involved in the case study activities examined (see below). Staff interviews also touched on the intervention logic of Cedefop but focused more on operational aspects.
- 12 interviews carried out with a selection of individual users who replied to the online survey of users. These were divided evenly between practitioners, policy makers and researchers and the aim of these interviews was to add colour and detail to the views of users about specific products and services.
- Another 12 interviews carried out with Intermediary Bodies, repartitioned between Study Visits NLOs/TSAs, National Europass Centres and ReferNet Coordinators intended to offer the evaluators greater insight into the respective Cedefop activities and to examine in more detail the IBs' views about their cooperation with Cedefop.

The strength of this aspect of the methodology was that it enabled us to gather a variety of different viewpoints that we were then able to triangulate. A weakness is that when reporting the views of a particular sub-group of interviewees, the source is a very limited absolute number of people, although this is balanced against the fact that these individuals have a good knowledge of Cedefop.

Focus Groups

Two focus groups were convened at Cedefop at the mid-point of the evaluation. One focus group was held with the Governing Bureau of the organisation and another with a selection of staff ranging from experts to secretaries.

The Governing Bureau focus group was attended by 8 Governing Bureau members and it was designed to look at wider strategic issues for the organisation and to recover an informed view of how the organisation currently stands in relation to its constantly changing external environment and how well it is configured to respond. The session also examined the organisational strategy for delivering the mission. This was to help the evaluators understand in more practical terms: i) how the organisation navigates to accommodate members' views; ii) how it makes judgements about how to act in relation to the balance of interests involved; iii) how it balances the mix of resources and; iv) how decisions on the shape of activities are undertaken and reviewed. It was critical also for us to understand the division of roles between the Bureau, the Board and the Director and to this effect an in-depth interview with the Director was carried out immediately prior to the Bureau Focus group.

The attendees for the staff focus group session were 8 staff members, from a selection from the ranks of experts and secretaries, who had not been previously interviewed. The technique used to run this focus group is a widely used interactive method for capturing the views of people in an organisation in a context where they are able to offer their real views in a non-attributable but open way. The number of staff members present in the focus group had to be limited to allow for the session to be run effectively but part of the technique is to ask the staff members present to also think of the points of view of their colleagues and to put forward views on behalf of Cedefop staff of all grades. The technique is essentially non-verbal and offers the opportunity for all levels and grades of staff to have equal voice in the proceedings. The session in Thessaloniki was structured around two core questions on what the key issues facing Cedefop staff at all grades are and what the possible solutions to these issues could be.

Case Studies

The purpose of the case studies was to explore in depth certain activities that Cedefop considered to be strategic and relevant to Cedefop's evolving role and the refocusing and reshaping of its activities. For the case studies to be most useful in the context of a formative evaluation, the case studies proposed by Cedefop and agreed to by the steering group focused on activities that were representative of Cedefop's evolution as a policy support body and included ReferNet, Skillsnet, the Study Visits Programme, and Policy Reporting for the Copenhagen Process (also referred to as the "Helsinki" case study). These activities were selected by the Steering Group as being strategic activities, an examination of which would benefit Cedefop in the context of this formative evaluation.

The methodology of each case study revolved around:

- a review of Cedefop documentation, web resources and other materials relevant to each case study activity;
- interviews with the Cedefop staff members involved in each case study activity and
- a further three to six interviews with external commentators having a view on the activity.

The methodology for each case study was agreed in advance, in consultation with the evaluation steering group and is described in detail in Annex Three.

Financial and Monitoring Data

This involved the collection of available information from Cedefop accounts published in the OJ for the financial years 2001, 2002, 2003, 2004 and 2005; Unpublished accounts for the financial year 2006 submitted by Cedefop to the Court of Auditors; Court of Auditors' reports for the financial years 2001, 2002, 2003, 2004, 2005 and selected detailed accounts for Cedefop's operational areas. The details of documentation requested and provided are also presented at the end of Annex Three, summarised in the Data Assessment Framework of the evaluation.

Strengths and limitations of the methodology

All evaluations face choices in terms of the methods they employ, not least because of limitations on financial resources and time available. Cedefop embraces a vast range of activities and has a broad customer base, so in this particular case it was important to select methods which would enable the evaluation to capture this breadth whilst also looking at certain areas in enough depth to be able to shine a more intense light on the performance of the organisation. We tried to capture breadth through our web surveys. Unfortunately we would have preferred higher response rates but clearly the responsiveness of the target groups, especially of intermediary bodies was somewhat limited. With the focus groups we tried to capture the views of those most closely involved

with Cedefop and by design participation was limited to 8 voices in each group. The case studies were employed to probe in depth some key aspects of Cedefop's activities but resources for these was necessarily limited. The overall mix of tools has enabled us to obtain an overview of Cedefop's effectiveness fleshed out with the detailed understanding that comes from case study work; it was also enabled us to hear the views of different stakeholder groups and to reach a judgement on the key evaluation questions. However, it should be borne in mind that our evaluation's conclusions have emerged from the finite number of views we have been able to solicit and the finite resources we have had at our disposal to carry out this evaluation.

2.0 The Changing Landscape of VET in the EU

2.1 The Early Years: Cedefop and the Emergence of EU VET Policy

Cedefop was established in 1975 and opened its doors in West Berlin in 1976. The relevant EU context of the time was to raise the profile of actions for equal opportunities for women; for measures to combat the sharp rise in youth unemployment; and for instruments to integrate the second generation of what were then known as migrant workers (mainly Spanish, Portuguese, Italian and Greek). In the context of its general information and documentation activities, these issues set the backdrop for Cedefop in its first ten years. In recognition of the need for a common set of standards of vocational training and the "mutual recognition of certificates and other documents" at the beginning of the 1980's Cedefop was then charged with the task of building up the required information system, initially at the level of skilled workers. By 1992, on the advent of the internal market, the task was regarded as substantially completed but the activities that served the building of the information system had the effect of grounding the organisation and giving it a shape that echoes through to the present day.

What was needed to perform the function was: an open-source ethos (that is documentation was to be made available to anyone wishing to access it to assert their rights or to know more); close cooperation with external experts nominated by the Member States and social partner organisations; a conference and translation service; and an increasing engagement with emerging ICT. Once the Maastricht Treaty came along, however, competence in the field of education and vocational training was fundamentally reshaped and the drive for harmonisation approaches came to an end. What remained, however, was Cedefop and its platform of competency with its focus on cooperation among experts and the capture and dissemination of information and intelligence on VET issues.

Post-Lisbon and the arrival of the Open Method of Coordination, the Copenhagen process has re-emphasised the value of the search for and exchange of best practice and for enhanced cross-national and cross-sector cooperation in vocational training – giving Cedefop, as we shall see in what follows, a new rationale to support its 30 years of acquired competency as an advice and information source for policy-makers at all levels.

2.2 Recent Trends and Turning Points

2.2.1 Lisbon and Education and Training 2010

The period since 2000 has been a highly significant phase in the development of VET policy in Europe. The key trigger was the adoption by the EU in 2000 of the Lisbon agenda and its subsequent impact on all relevant policy fields. Within education and training, consideration of the contribution which the EU might make to achieving the Lisbon goals led to the adoption in 2001 of the Communication on Making a European Area of Lifelong Learning a Reality³ and also to the adoption of three concrete strategic objectives:

- Increasing the quality and effectiveness of education and training systems
- Facilitating access for all
- Opening up systems to the wider world⁴.

These objectives were subsequently operationalised into the Education and Training 2010 work programme which has provided the broad framework for policy development since and also a reference point for the assessment of progress, which is reviewed every two years.

This was significant as a backdrop to Cedefop as it signalled the setting of more clearly defined priorities, and agreement amongst Member States that significant reforms were needed in their education and training systems, a step change from the previous period in which policy had been more fragmented and tended to be developed in response to specific needs.

This development also gave much greater weight than hitherto to calls at EU level for change. Thus, in 2004 the biennial review called for 'urgent' reforms of Europe's education and training systems⁵, and in 2006 for acceleration in the pace of reforms to ensure a more effective contribution to the Lisbon strategy and the strengthening of the European social model, and for more progress in relation to the quality and attractiveness of VET⁶.

³ Making a European Area of Lifelong Learning a Reality, Commission Communication COM(2001) 678 final (November 2001) http://ec.europa.eu/education/policies/lll/life/index_en.html

⁴ Report from the Education Council to the European Council on "The concrete future objectives of education and training systems." http://ec.europa.eu/education/policies/2010/doc/rep_fut_obj_en.pdf

⁵ Education and Training 2010: The success of the Lisbon strategy hinges on urgent reforms, 3 March 2004

⁶ Modernising Education and Training: A Vital Contribution to Prosperity and Social Cohesion in Europe, 2006 Joint Interim Report of the Council and of the Commission on Progress Under the "Education and Training 2010" Work Programme

2.2.2 The Copenhagen process

In parallel with these developments, 2002 saw the adoption by Member States of the Copenhagen declaration which established a process to take forward policy specifically in the VET field. The process was designed to enable Member States to agree common objectives and to monitor progress in a field where the EU has limited competence and responsibility for policy lies at national level. The Copenhagen process is effectively the key tool for the Open Method of Coordination (OMC) in the VET field.

Significantly for Cedefop's operating context, Education and Training 2010 and the Copenhagen process cover similar territory but co-exist rather than having been merged. The reason for this is that whilst both Education and Training 2010 and the Copenhagen process involve Member States on a voluntary basis, Education and Training 2010 was formally adopted by the Council. As we will show later in the report, the tensions at the heart of this arrangement have been a key factor shaping Cedefop's response to the developing policy field over the period covered by the evaluation.

Copenhagen set out four priorities⁷:

- Strengthening the European dimension⁸
- Transparency, information and guidance
- Recognition of competences and qualifications
- Quality assurance.

In terms of how these should be achieved within the broad context of the OMC, it also established that “measures should be voluntary and principally developed through bottom-up cooperation” and that “initiatives must be focused on the needs of citizens and user organisations”. In practice, a key role in focusing and animating the Copenhagen process has been played by meetings of the Directors General of Vocational Training which bring together senior civil servants from the Member States. This mechanism has been an important route through which Cedefop has developed its relationship with Member States, and played an increasingly important role in the Copenhagen process.

⁷ “The Copenhagen Declaration” – Declaration of the European Ministers of Vocational Education and Training and the European Commission, convened in Copenhagen on 29 and 30 November 2002 on enhanced European cooperation in vocational education and training http://ec.europa.eu/education/copenhagen/copenahagen_declaration_en.pdf

⁸ with the aim of improving closer cooperation in order to facilitate and promote mobility and the development of inter-institutional cooperation, partnerships and other transnational initiatives, all in order to raise the profile of the European education and training area in an international context so that Europe will be recognised as a world-wide reference for learners.

Since 2002 progress and priorities in VET have been reviewed twice, once at Maastricht in 2004 and again at Helsinki at the very end of 2006. Maastricht was important for the Copenhagen process for a number of reasons but in particular in defining priorities more clearly. The Copenhagen Declaration had achieved an unprecedented degree of agreement on the need for change in European VET systems, and activity in the period from 2002 and 2004 mostly consisted of establishing greater cooperation around the broad objectives agreed. At Maastricht, the time was ripe for establishing clearer priorities for VET and for the first time to set national priorities. At Maastricht partners “agreed to strengthen their cooperation with a view to modernising their VET systems in order for Europe to become the most competitive economy and offering all Europeans ... the qualifications and competences they need to be fully integrated into the emerging knowledge-based society, contributing to more and better jobs.”⁹

Following Maastricht, attention shifted to the issue of how to achieve the priorities. At Helsinki it was agreed that the process should become still more focused if the required changes in VET were to be achieved, with better processes for mutual learning and greater involvement of all stakeholders. Significantly for Cedefop, the Helsinki Communiqué also called for the implementation of the Copenhagen process and its priorities to be supported through 'the continued support of Cedefop and the European Training Foundation and their networks', especially in relation to monitoring progress in the priority areas and reporting on developments, and their 'close cooperation on statistics, indicators and benchmarks'¹⁰

2.2.3 Enlargement

At the same time as these changes were taking place, the process of EU enlargement was also in train and on 1st January 2004, 10 new Member States joined the EU with a further two joining on 1st January 2007. This brought into the union a new group of Member States with different histories and needs to existing members. In the case of the former socialist countries especially there was (and remains) a strong desire to learn from practice in the old Member States in order to modernise their systems – or in the case of some states like the Czech Republic to revert to the pre-socialist models which they once shared with their neighbours . During the socialist era VET was part of a rigid system

⁹ Maastricht Communiqué on the Future Priorities of Enhanced European Cooperation in VET (Review of the Copenhagen Declaration of 30 November 2002)

¹⁰ The Helsinki Communiqué on Enhanced European Cooperation in Vocational Education and Training, Communiqué of the European Ministers of Vocational Education and Training, the European Social partners, and the European Commission, convened in Helsinki on 5 December 2006 to review the priorities and strategies of the Copenhagen Process

which tracked individuals into occupations within state-controlled labour markets, and the corollary of this was that systems for Continuing Vocational Training were especially underdeveloped. Since the end of the socialist era some countries have struggled to reform their VET systems to meet the emerging needs of their developing market economies, and their admission to the EU presents an important learning opportunity. This has led to new demands on Cedefop and has increased the complexity of its operating environment.

2.3 Conclusions

The development and adoption by the EU of the Lisbon agenda in 2000 has provided a focus around which a coherent set of VET policies has been able to form for the first time; prior to this, policy had been much more fragmented and responsive to more specific needs. Indeed, developments since 2000 have signalled an increasing recognition at the highest levels in the EU of the importance of VET as a key tool in the development of human capital in relation to Lisbon and in the alleviation of social disadvantage. VET has moved up the general economic and social agendas.

EU policy and shared Member State priorities have built up in a gradually unfolding process of development which has increasingly impacted on Cedefop. A number of developments were especially significant for the demands placed on Cedefop and the role(s) it might play:

- There has been a change in the respective roles being played by Cedefop's key stakeholders in the development of VET policy – Member States, the EC and social partners – with the EC playing an increasingly important role in calling for change, Member States drawing together around common goals, and increasing emphasis being placed on the active involvement of a wide range of stakeholders.
- There have been changes in the needs of Member States with respect to the types of activity undertaken by Cedefop. The agreement of common priorities in VET means that the many and varied ad hoc needs stemming from individual national priorities which used to provide the operating demand context for Cedefop have been superseded by needs related to a coherent body of common priorities and an emerging consensus about the types of approaches that are conducive to the achievement of the Lisbon goals. Furthermore, there has emerged an increased focus on the need for VET system reform - not simply minor changes at the margins but in some cases significant reviews of structure and function. Alongside this general development there has been a need to respond to the demands of a new group of Member States seeking to modernise their systems.

- There has been an increasing realisation that new methods need to be found through which Member States can learn from one another, culminating in the call at Helsinki for a more systematic approach to strengthen mutual learning. This has impacted to some extent already on Cedefop, but arguably further developments are likely in this area.
- At EU level there has been an increasing need for the development and implementation of common European level tools and for the monitoring of progress against the priorities agreed through the Copenhagen process and in Education and Training 2010.

In important ways, the evaluation is essentially the story of how efficiently and effectively Cedefop has responded to these changing contextual demands. Significantly, as we shall show later, rather than being an active and key player from the start of this process, Cedefop's engagement has been gradual, with the most significant impacts in the latter years of the evaluation period.

3.0 Cedefop: The Background Context

3.1 Cedefop: A Brief Institutional History

3.1.1 The founding Regulation

Cedefop was established in 1975 at a time when the European Union was much smaller; when social, political and economic circumstances were very different and when VET had different roles to perform. At that time, the VET sector in Europe was highly fragmented and there was a lack of a knowledge base on its size and shape. Indeed, VET in many countries was regarded as, what some have termed, the 'Cinderella' of education and training, being comparatively under-funded, having less status than 'academic' education and receiving less attention as far as research was concerned. Over time things have, of course, significantly improved - with a growing recognition by the EU and its Member States of the role of VET - not least as a key component in a continuous process of lifelong learning^{11 12}.

Against this background, Cedefop has been unique in its 30 year role as a dedicated EU VET-focused agency with a brief to deal with the issues of fragmentation, lack of knowledge, under emphasis on research and a lack of standing in policy and practice at the European level. Its remit as set out in the founding Regulations was (and still is) as follows:

- *“to assist the Commission in encouraging at Community level, the promotion and development of vocational training and of in-service training”;*
 - *“to contribute, through its scientific and technical activities, to the implementation of a common vocational training policy”;*
 - *“to encourage the exchange of information and the comparison of experience”*
- (Regulation 337/75, Article 2.1)

¹¹ A general driver for change was the FORCE programme, which ran for four years from January 1991 - with the aim of supporting and complementing the policies and activities developed by and in the Member States in the areas of continuing vocational training was a recognition outside Cedefop of the need, amongst other things, to encourage more and better investments in CVT and greater returns. (Council Decision 90/267/EEC).

¹² But, as Mulder has pointed out, even today there are only three journals with the word 'vocational' in their title, and no journal dedicated to VET has yet made it into the 180 or so journals that appear in the Social Science Citation Index. (Paper presented to Cedefop Agora, 22-23rd February 2007 on the European Journal of Vocational Training)

These, what in evaluation logic would be called *global objectives*, are clearly very broadly drawn and they have, partly because of this breadth, stood the test of time. They have, however, as we shall go on to see later in the report sometimes made it challenging for Cedefop to give a clear focus to its activities and to be clear about *in whose interests* it should primarily be operating. The breadth of the "global" mandate from the Regulation does, however, confer significant advantages in a fast-changing world. It has offered the scope for the organisation itself to make hard strategic choices about what to do and what not to do, what to emphasise and what not to. One of the key issues for the report that follows is to make a judgement as to how well this has gone over the last six years – where the choices made the right ones and what opportunity costs did they incur for those things foregone?

The founding Regulation also offered a more detailed prescription about what Cedefop needed to do at the level of what, in evaluation logic, would be called *specific objectives*. These were set down in 1975 as follows:

- *Document vocational training;*
 - *Contribute to the development and coordination of research on vocational training;*
 - *Disseminate all useful documentation and information;*
 - *Support concerted approach to vocational training problems with specific view on mutual recognition of vocational training;*
 - *Provide a forum for all those concerned;*
- (Regulation 337/75, Article 2.2)

Once again, the mandate is set out in very general terms and is chiefly concerned with setting out how Cedefop should support the overall development of VET (that is through documentation, coordination of research, dissemination, cooperation, exchange of information and so on). The implication of this is what we shall be describing throughout much of this report as acting as an *open source* for VET information and intelligence across the board. From an evaluation perspective, the key indicators that this sort of open source approach leads us to look for are those familiar to any normal marketplace – degree of "market" penetration, customer satisfaction, perceived product quality, responsiveness to shifting customer requirements and so on. The judgemental criteria for evaluation are broadly based on quanta and trend – how much or how many over how long and with what levels of utility, efficiency and effectiveness. We shall be setting these out later in the report¹³.

¹³ Among the specific objectives on the Regulation only one more specific and easily measurable outcome is demanded – that is the mutual recognition of qualifications. However, in the context of current VET policy, the mutual recognition of

As we have observed, there was scope for the role of Cedefop to change and develop over time within this broad framework of global and specific objectives. One noteworthy shift in the overall strategic balance of Cedefop was picked up in the *Meta-evaluation of EU Agencies* in 2003. This was succinctly described as follows:

'Cedefop was set up in 1975 to assist the Commission in encouraging the promotion and development of vocational education and training at Community level – today it plays a role in the implementation of vocational education and training policy' (p 38).

From the perspective of the present report and the findings of the evaluation this statement is highly pertinent. What it points to is a movement away from *promotion and development* and toward *implementation* in the context of *VET policy*. Put another way it suggests a shift of focus from what we called earlier the open source ethos (general help for promotion and development) to an emphasis on policy and its implementation (assisting in the formulation of VET policy and the implementation of such policy). This shift also implies a shift of balance in the answer to the "in whose interests" question we raised earlier. Once again, we can set this out as one of the key topics for the report as we examine current strategy and its provenance over the years covered by the evaluation.

3.1.2 The institutional and governance context

Besides setting out its global and specific objectives, the founding Regulation also established a position for Cedefop in institutional terms. There was both an internal and external aspect to this. Taking the internal aspect first, it was clear that the issues that Cedefop was established to deal with required the involvement of both Member States and social partners. In recognition of this, both were formally included in the membership of the Governing Board (Management Board before enlargement). At the same time, it was considered that Cedefop should have a measure of independence from the main policy development and (political) decision-making structures of the European Commission, so as not to circumscribe its activities unduly. The product of these two - independently quite legitimate - considerations was, however, to place Cedefop in an ambiguous position; sitting in the space between, on the one hand, the European Commission and, on the other, the Member States and the social partners.

vocational training is not a priority for the EU member states and therefore is no longer relevant. Indeed, a future review of the regulation may consider deletion of this objective.

While entirely sensible in terms of formal governance, this choice of institutional arrangements by Regulation has required Cedefop to mediate the interests of two stakeholders (Commission and Board) that stand in a different relation both to the organisation and to each other. The European Commission is the overall paymaster and guardian of the broad Regulatory framework for Cedefop as a European agency while the Board (which includes Commission representatives as members) is de jure the constituted body responsible for the conduct of Cedefop affairs. We shall look more closely at the implications of these structural arrangements at a later stage but it is worth pointing out here that the previous evaluation (2001) indicated that there was evidence of a division in the Management Board between those members who would have liked to have seen the Centre being more active in highlighting policy implications, and those who felt that the Centre should mainly concentrate on disseminating research and information¹⁴. This adds an institutional dimension to the argument set out earlier that the principal axis around which debates on strategy revolve for Cedefop is this issue of an *open source* versus *policy development and implementation* bias. While representatives of the wider VET community of interest might intuitively be expected to favour the first, it might also be intuited that the European Commission might well have greater interest in the second. Clearly, we are not the first evaluators to recognise this.

Another element in this increasingly complex bundle of influences on Cedefop is that the founding Regulation also gave the Centre wide scope in terms of the roles and actions it could legitimately carry out. As we have seen above, the objectives it was given used verbs such as 'assist', 'contribute' and 'encourage', notions compatible with the EU principle of subsidiarity – that is to be helpful, to be sensitive to their needs. These undoubtedly have had a long-standing impact on the types of relationships Cedefop forged with other organisations and individuals active in the VET field in Europe. The sense of the discourse is that, by regulation, Cedefop's relationships with others have tended to be framed in a context of *facilitation and support*. While to an extent, a role privileging *influence and leadership* might be seen to exist by implication there is no "chapter and verse" as it stands to make this later, more specifically interventionist obligation clear.

¹⁴ Interestingly, the Commission for its part was reported as feeling that Cedefop's involvement in making policy recommendations sometimes led the organisation "to the edge of its competences". In a similar vein, the *Meta-Evaluation of EU Agencies* noted in 2003 that the independence of agencies like Cedefop could "bring credibility and acceptability but that this meant certain trade-offs in terms of potential loss of utility of agency outputs for policy-making purposes".

All of these considerations bear upon what might be called the 'strategic positioning' of Cedefop within the VET community. We shall be dedicating Chapter Five to an in-depth discussion of this issue but it has been a noticeable feature of the most recent phase of Cedefop's history that, while in the past there seemed to be an administrative emphasis on broad-spectrum objective setting and delivery, there is now far more concern with *strategic positioning with respect to policy implementation* and its implications for the focus of activity.

3.1.3 Institutional responses to a changing context for EU VET

Thus far we have set the scene in terms of the origins of Cedefop, and we have shown how important the founding principles were (and still are) for the Centre. However, as we set out in Chapter Two, the late 1990's marked a watershed for the development of VET in the EU. First, a coherent EU policy has developed – in part as we shall show later through the intervention of Cedefop - and this has drawn the organisation into a significantly enhanced policy development role¹⁵. Second, the Copenhagen process has brought about a shift in the relationships amongst Member States and between them and the Commission which, given the institutional structure we have just described, served to change the context within which Cedefop works. Third, there has been an enhanced recognition of the role of the social partners and a requirement for social dialogue – playing to the strengths of Cedefop but moulding the terms of internal debate in new ways. Fourth, enlargement has added a fundamental dimension to the entire debate – geographically, culturally and politically – presenting Cedefop with a wholly new set of challenges.

The events that shifted the EU platform for VET so significantly in the late 1990s are those that set the agenda for those actions of Cedefop that form the subject matter for our evaluation for the period 2001-2006. Clearly, there have been what can only be described as *fundamental* changes in the nature and direction of VET policy at EU level and the organisation has had to find ways of navigating its way through them. The sense is that there has been a shift in the role of European Community agencies in the direction of *implementation* and we shall go on to show how this has presented Cedefop with particular challenges in the light of its original founding ethos as set out in the 1975 Regulation.

¹⁵ Some interviewees see Cedefop's work in regard to non-formal learning as having had a significant role to play in this process as this work in particular was influential with respect to giving Cedefop a role in shaping the agenda of the meetings of the Directors General for Vocational Training.

3.2 Organisational Structure and System of Management

3.2.1 The legal status and overall shape of the organisation

Cedefop was established by Council Regulation 337/75 as a non-profit independent body (see Council Regulation Article 1¹⁶) to assist the European Commission in promoting the development of vocational education and training, and is together with the Foundation for the Improvement of Living and Working Conditions (also established in 1975), the oldest of the 22 Community agencies. The current definition of the Cedefop legal status reads 'A Community agency is a body governed by European public law; it is distinct from the Community Institutions (Council, Parliament, Commission, etc.) and has its own legal personality. It is set up by an act of secondary legislation in order to accomplish a very specific technical, scientific or managerial task, in the framework of the European Union's first pillar'.¹⁷

Community agencies have a regular, annually agreed, funding stream derived from a budget line under the aegis of the EU Budgetary Authority (European Parliament and Council). In this respect, they are subject to the full panoply of rules and regulations for drawing down, spending and accounting for the finance they receive¹⁸. They are also required to operate under strict audit rules and (as manifest by this report) are drawn into the EU framework for the evaluation of actions and programmes. They are also closely constrained by regulation to comply with the rules concerning EU recruitment procedures and human resources management¹⁹. Changes in governance and rules of procedure are also laid down by Articles within the founding Regulation. Changes in the rules of procedure are agreed to by the Council of the European Union.

As an organisation Cedefop is, then, embedded within a rigid framework of regulatory compliance that, as we shall go on to show, has a significant impact on its operations and on the administrative procedures required to support them. There are, for example, clear limitations on what can and cannot be done "within the rules" and this provides the Board of the organisation with very particular sorts of challenges and requirements – ones that might be at best "unfamiliar" to business and social partner representatives. By

¹⁶ Regulation (EEC) No 337/75 of the Council of 10 February 1975 establishing a European Centre for the Development of Vocational Training

¹⁷ See the European Union website on Community Agencies http://europa.eu/agencies/index_en.htm

¹⁸ This requires an annual review of accounts by the European Commission, Court of Auditors, European Parliament and the Council

¹⁹ Cedefop's staff are subject to the regulations and rules applicable to the officials and other servants of the European Communities.

Community agency standards Cedefop could be considered to be at the "small" end of the scale range and, given the fixed overhead costs that come with reporting and rule compliance, this is a variable that will need to be considered when, later in the report, we come to questions of unit costs and efficiency. Outside the realm of compliance, the notion that an agency has its own "legal personality" can bring other complexities with respect, for example, to matters of the ownership of intellectual property – an issue of contemporary significance as Cedefop moves toward the production of definable "tools and instruments" for policy.

All of this has at least two very significant implications for this evaluation - first, the freedom of the Board to act strategically and operationally is constrained in very specific ways and second, the "administrative load" necessary to service regulatory requirements is one that gives the organisation both a particular shape and a budgetary bias toward high fixed overhead costs.

3.2.2 The governance structure

The Governing Board

The Governing Board is Cedefop's supreme management / decision-taking body and its operation is regulated in Cedefop's founding regulation.²⁰ The Board is appointed by Council decision for periods of three years (the current board is appointed, for example, for the period 18 September 2006 to 17 September 2009).²¹ It is composed of representatives of: governments, employee organisations and employer organisations (for these three groups there is one representative for each of the 27 Member States). Moreover, there are three European Commission representatives (Directorate General Education and Culture), two 'Coordinators' (the Confederation of European Business and the European Trade Union Confederation) and four observers (three from Norway and one from Iceland). In total this produces some 88 members (including the four observers). The Board meets once a year (additional meetings can be convened at the request of at least one-third of the members of the Governing Board) and decisions are taken by an absolute majority of its members (decisions are taken at the annual meeting or by written procedure). Enlargement brought a step change in the size and functioning of the Governing Board: before enlargement, the then Management Board was almost half the size and met twice a year.

²⁰ Article 4. Regulation (EEC) No 337/75 of the Council of 10 February 1975

²¹ See Council Decision of 18 September 2006 in Official Journal C 240/1 of 5 October 2006 and Council Decision of 25 May 2007 in Official Journal C 120/4 of 31 May 2007

There are some features of these arrangements that are immediately significant for the present study. First, there is a clear focus on legitimate quadripartite representation. Second, the scale of the Board (88 members) and the infrequency of normal meetings have significant implications for its functionality as the "supreme management / decision-taking body" for the organisation and some of the limitations of the model were raised with us at an early stage of the evaluation²². While it is not part of our brief to offer a view on these governance issues, they do have a substantial role in conditioning the way objectives and work programmes are evolved and set and how resources and staff are allocated to competing uses. In part as a response to these issues of effective management and decision-making, the founding Regulation requires Cedefop to establish a Bureau and it is to this that we now turn.

The Governing Bureau and Enlarged Bureau

The Bureau is an executive group charged with helping the full Board of Cedefop to be efficient and effective in ordering and discharging its programme of business. It has a critical role in organisational management and is the repository of the best knowledge about the overall mission of the organisation and the operational activities designed to carry it out. The Bureau is made up of the chair and the three vice-chairs of the Governing Board, the coordinator of the Governments' Group, the coordinator of the Employees' Group, the coordinator of the Employers' Group and two representatives of the European Commission services.

The function of the Bureau by Regulation (Article 4/8, 5) is broadly speaking (and under several "without prejudice" conditions) to "take decisions which are urgent or necessary for governing the centre between meetings of the Governing Board". In July 2006, the revised rules of procedure for the Governing Board (Revised Rules of Procedure, OJEC, C182/2) provided the possibility of an enlarged Bureau with up to three additional members per group²³. Under this, the Governing Board was given the possibility to enlarge the Bureau for meetings on strategic issues for future Governing Board decisions and the enlarged Bureau has been operating over the past year on specific issues as per the work programme.

²² There was, for example, some criticism of the annual board meetings. A number of board members feel that 'only' one meeting per year does not offer genuine involvement and that the "written procedure" system for prior documentation and decision making can give "insufficient time to react" in critical areas of activity.

²³ Article 2.5, 'Revised Rules of Procedure of the Governing Board of the European Centre for the Development of Vocational Training', 2006/C 182/02, Approved by the Council on 24 July 2006, OJ C 182 of 04.08.2006, p.2.

Audit and Monitoring arrangements

The introduction of internal audit mechanisms (establishment of Internal Audit Capability and an Audit Committee) at Cedefop was recommended by the European Commission's Internal Audit Service assessment of Cedefop's internal control systems in 2004. The Internal Audit Service (IAS) visited Cedefop in December 2004 and classified Cedefop as 'unsatisfactory'.²⁴ IAS made a number of comments and a number of changes have been made internally to address the issues raised. Subsequent IAS reports found progress had been made and on 16 December 2006, an internal auditor was appointed at Cedefop. The Cedefop Annual Accounts 2006 state that:

“The audit report of the IAS of December 2006 confirmed that procedures are now regular and that the recommendations have been either fully implemented or - in one remaining case - are well on their way to full implementation. Cedefop made a major effort in 2006 to strengthen its internal control environment and to implement the audit recommendations of 2005. These efforts were supported by staff; their continued commitment will help complete this phase in 2007”.

A key feature of the role with relevance for this study is that the internal auditor is tasked to support the introduction of activity-based budgeting. In April 2007 Cedefop launched its new audit strategy and its preliminary audit plan for 2007. This is designed to set the framework for medium-term objectives (2007 to 2009) and implements the new audit rules particularly in respect of procurement and recruitment procedures. In terms of the establishment of an internal Audit Committee to advise Cedefop²⁵, the Bureau recently decided that as long as the IAS remains as the external audit institution for the EU agencies, a separate Audit Committee will not be set up but that the Bureau will take over the responsibilities of an Audit Committee and will evaluate the workload and practicability of this decision²⁶.

²⁴ Ranked on a four-level scale ('satisfactory', 'satisfactory with qualifications', 'unsatisfactory' and 'not under control'), eight agencies had been classified as 'satisfactory with qualifications' and two agencies, one of them Cedefop, as 'unsatisfactory'.

²⁵ The Internal Audit Service had made a recommendation to Cedefop in October 2005 to set up an internal audit capability and an Audit Committee to ensure the independence of the audit capability and report at least once a year on the audits to the Governing Board..

²⁶ Cedefop Draft Audit Report on Implementation of the Recommendations of the IAS and ECA

3.2.3 Internal management structure

Organisation into Areas

Following recommendations from the PLS Ramboll external evaluation, Cedefop configured itself into a series of *Areas* of activity between 2001 and 2003. These were constructed around Cedefop's basic tasks and were introduced both to improve transparency and to facilitate the delegation of responsibility. Five areas were initially established: Area A: developing research, Area B: reporting and facilitating a concerted approach, Area C: exchange and supporting partners, Area D: information, communication and dissemination, and Area E: administration, facilities and resources. A further internal reform in 2006, following the arrival of the new Director, saw Cedefop's administrative services re-organised (mainly in the area of procurement, finance, information and communication). This was in parallel with the establishment of the internal audit function. Finally, in the summer of 2007, this was followed by a further comprehensive reorganisation of the operational areas. Four new divisions of activity – still under the title *Areas* - were recognised.

These are now as follows:

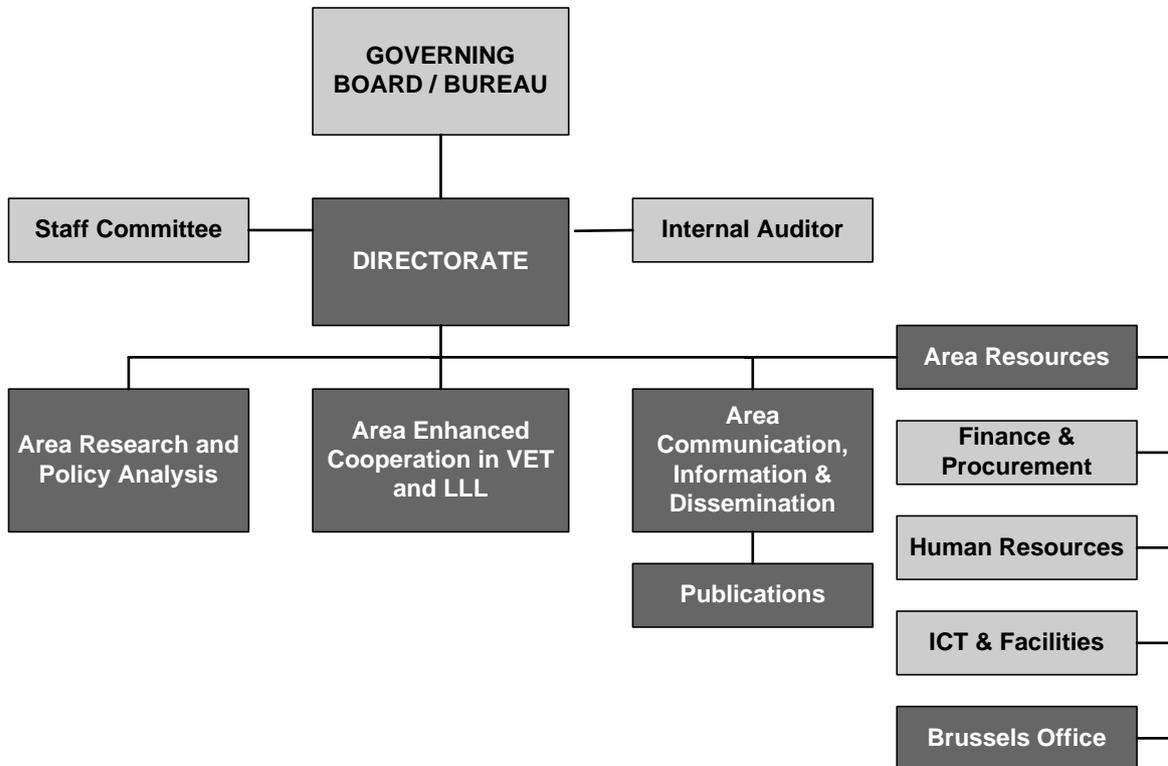
- Research and Policy Analysis;
- Enhanced Cooperation in VET and LLL;
- Communication, Information and Dissemination;
- Resources;

The organogram in Figure 3.1 presents the current internal organisational structure of Cedefop²⁷.

²⁷As presented on the Cedefop website: <http://www.Cedefop.europa.eu/index.asp?section=2&sub=2>

Figure 3.1 Cedefop organisation chart

CEDEFOP Organisation chart (situation at 1 September 2007)



From the perspective of the study reported here, the most significant feature of the internal changes just described is how many of them there have been over such a short period of time. Indeed, in setting out the background to the results of the evaluation between 2001 and 2006 (de facto 2007), it is clear that there were important management difficulties in the years up to 2004-2005, since when a process of recovery has taken place, involving a re-configuration of the internal organisational and management structure of Cedefop. More than that, this pattern of events has affected attitudes and behaviour throughout the organisation and there is a duty upon us as the external evaluators both to acknowledge and understand this and to be sensitive in dealing with it while carrying out the task assigned to us.

3.2.4 Financial management and the structure of the financial regulation

With respect to budget and annual staffing requirements, Cedefop's arrangements follow the mechanisms laid down by the founding Regulation. In March of each year a budget and staffing plan ('establishment plan') is prepared by Cedefop and, following approval by the European Parliament, is formally adopted by the Governing Board.²⁸ Cedefop's Governing Board is responsible for adopting the Centre's financial rules in accordance with the European Commission's general Financial Regulation.²⁹ These set out the structure of the Cedefop budget under the following four headings:³⁰

- expenditure on staff authorised in the establishment plan: there shall be an amount of appropriations and a number of employment posts corresponding to this expenditure;
- expenditure on external staff (including auxiliary staff and other agency staff) and other management expenditure (including representation, mission and meeting expenses);
- expenditure on buildings and other related expenditure, including cleaning and maintenance, rental and hiring, telecommunications, water, gas and electricity;
- support expenditure;

Once again, these arrangements represent a "given" for the organisation and compliance with them is a legal duty. Cedefop works financially on an annualised profile of revenue and expenditure and to this extent its ability to respond to the cycles of change that we have described earlier as characteristic of the policy world it inhabits is limited. Attempting to dovetail a balance of shifting activity to meet changing demands within a tightly constrained (and essentially public administration based) model with year-on-year increments of resource is challenging in normal circumstances. Trying to achieve organisational restructuring and to re-position an organisation within such close constraints makes the challenge extreme. The evaluation which we set out here provides an opportunity to measure how well or otherwise these challenges were met – but with a close eye on the contingent circumstances surrounding the attempt.

²⁸ Article 10. Regulation (EEC) No 337/75 of the Council of 10 February 1975

²⁹ Article 12. Regulation (EEC) No 337/75 of the Council of 10 February 1975

³⁰ Article 2. Cedefop decision of 16 March 2006 amending Cedefop DECISION of 31 March 2003 laying down detailed rules for the implementation of the Decision on the financial rules applicable to the European Centre for the Development of Vocational Training in conformity with the framework Financial Regulation for the bodies referred to in Article 185 of Council Regulation (EC, Euratom) No 1605/2002 of 25 June 2002 (Financial Regulation applicable to the general budget of the European Communities).

3.3 **Baseline Conditions at Cedefop in 2001: The PLS Ramboll Evaluation**

It is one of the benefits of the European Commission evaluation regime that each successive evaluator has the opportunity to set out from a known point. The cycle of evaluations helps future researchers to start their work from a platform set by their predecessors. In this case we are fortunate to have available to us the evaluation of Cedefop conducted in 2001 by PLS Ramboll.

3.3.1 The PLS Ramboll evaluation

The main purpose of the work in 2001 was to assess the internal efficiency and external effectiveness of Cedefop compared to its statutory objectives, including Cedefop's policy guidelines and medium-term priorities in the period 1997-2000. The terms of reference were specifically to address the following questions:

- The Centre's activities in supporting the implementation of the Leonardo da Vinci programme, in particular the Study Visits measure.
- The Centre's co-operation with the Commission in assisting it in implementing a vocational training policy at European level, and with the Social Partners and the Member States.
- The Centre's co-operation with other EU bodies working in related fields, particularly the European Training Foundation, Eurydice and the European Foundation for the Improvement of Living and Working Conditions.
- The functioning of the Management Board.

Since the PLS Ramboll evaluation is available in full elsewhere and since we have set ourselves to keep the present report within limits in the interests of readability, we set out here some of the salient findings insofar as they assist us in our own exercise. In the Inception Report we extracted the key findings and recommendations as we began to organise our own work programme. In closing this section on background it will be helpful just to extract some of the more significant findings of the earlier evaluation to see what issues there were at that time and how some of these have been repeated in our own evaluation – perhaps as the "constants" that Cedefop is likely generally to find itself confronted with as a product of its particular mission and the institutional format that we have just been describing. We see the following as important in guiding us from the situation in 2001 through the early part of the decade when management difficulties emerged and into the subsequent period when the IAS reported that they had been addressed. Indeed, as we shall see below, in some important respects what the PLS Ramboll evaluation found prefigured some of the difficulties that subsequently developed.

3.3.2 Summary of key findings and recommendations by PLS Ramboll (2001)

- 1 The general assessment was that Cedefop was doing important work in the promotion and development of vocational education and training in the European context and that the Centre mostly focused on the right VET issues. A weakness that we shall see repeated in this study was that the Centre was trying to do too much, often being unable to set "negative priorities". It was considered that by becoming more focused, the Centre might increasingly be able both to set the agenda in the VET area and raise the visibility of the Centre.
- 2 There was a suggestion that the majority of the Management Board members believed that the relationship between Cedefop and the European Commission had improved considerably and the Centre was better fulfilling its aims as defined in the statutory objectives. There was, however, some division among Board members between those wanting to see the Centre become more active in highlighting policy implications, and those who believed that the Centre should concentrate on disseminating research and information. This issue, as we shall show, continues to be debated to the present day.
- 3 There was a Commission-sponsored view that more attention needed to be given to facilitating and strengthening close co-operation between Cedefop and other international organisations – once again a continuing thread of discussion and debate.
- 4 There was praise in particular (as there is in this study) for the work of Cedefop in building and developing VET networks and in bringing people together to break down the barriers between different professions and countries –but there was some comment about the extent to which the different networks received seemed to differ.
- 5 On information and communication services, there was widespread satisfaction with the information material produced by Cedefop and the way it was communicated. But – and this is an area where the current report is more critical – it was considered that the overall information and communication strategy of the Centre had "scope for improvement".
- 6 In terms of research the 2001 view was that the quality of Cedefop's research activities was "quite high" and was becoming "better related to the general EU agenda". There was, however, a belief that the quality of research was variable and it was suggested that what was needed was a formal quality control system and obligatory peer reviews. Within the scope of the present exercise we have the opportunity to look at how this was played out.
- 7 With respect to the "internal efficiency" there were inevitable issues to report (as for any organisation) but what is interesting for us here is what emerged from the following recommendations:

- special emphasis should be given to introducing activity-based management, in addition to the development of activity-based budgeting (which was said to be "in progress at the time") and the appropriate instruments, including priorities and guidelines, be developed, for resource allocation;
 - a need for better management skills and systems and a clear division of tasks between the Director and the Deputy Director together with a clear structure and division of tasks which would improve the overall coordination of the organisation;
 - improved strategies and policies for an effective internal communication and use of ICT including a review of strategy of information and communication services to target the information needs of specific groups of stakeholders who use different types and format of information;
 - a human resource development strategy designed to ensure proper management, training and motivation;
 - clear and measurable objectives for each thematic priority in the annual work programme and operating guidelines – set , where possible, in terms of measurable output and impact indicators within a system of monitoring progress and reporting should be put in place. We shall be re-visiting this in our own recommendations.
- 8 In setting medium-term priorities as a goal-setting tool, there was a concern that the process for developing the priorities was too top-down and that the medium-term priorities plan had therefore become "a political document too broad and too muddled". We too have a view on the need for new approaches to goal setting.

We fully acknowledge that the list compiled above does not do justice to the full PLS Ramboll evaluation. Our purpose in ending this chapter on the background context in this way was not so much to lay down a detailed baseline platform to move forward from (this was done in the Inception Report) but to make a link to the chapters that follow which constitute the heat of the report. What we can clearly see is a hint of *"plus ça change, plus c'est la même chose"*. Some of the core issues for 2001 are those that Cedefop confronts today despite the events of the intervening years. Our view of this is essentially a benign one.

Some of the issues are structural and a matter of legitimate difference of opinion – open source versus policy leader and implementer for example. It is right that they are constantly debated and that questions about the balance continue to be asked as Cedefop steers its way against a changing world. Other issues under the strategy heading we shall go on to describe as ones that the senior management and Board have been wrestling with in the last two years in a deliberate attempt to re-position Cedefop to ensure a more stable and sustainable future. Indeed, the real surprise would have been if in some way they would have been considered as "dealt with". On internal structures and issues like

ICT and dissemination policies we shall be able to point to some recommendations carried through but others where there is more to be done. As we begin to interpret the body of material collected to support our own evaluation, we are now in a position to know something about the ex-ante conditions in 2001 as well as some of the structural, organisational and regulatory constraints that surround an agency like Cedefop as it strives to carry out the mission originally designed for it over 30 years ago.

4.0 Strategic Issues: Meeting User Needs and Achieving the Right Balance

4.1 The Key Questions for Strategy

We set out in Chapter Two the key questions for the evaluation. At this point we want to start offering answers to some of them. In this Chapter we want to explore those questions that have strategic significance in relation to the role Cedefop performs for its client community using the evidence collected through the two web surveys and interviews. Put simply we want to explore the following:

Is Cedefop In the right (strategic) place to serve its client community?
Operating to the right balance of interests in its client community?
Doing the right things in relation to that balance of interests?

Box One relates these questions to the formal language of evaluation as we have set them out in Annexe One and in the table of key evaluation themes in Annex Two.

BOX ONE

The Key Evaluation Questions for this Section of the Report

Relevance: To what extent are the Cedefop objectives relevant in relation to the evolving needs and priorities of its client community?

Results: To what extent have Cedefop's objectives been successfully carried out?

Added Value: Is Cedefop's approach to its activities preferable to other ways of delivering the same results?

4.2 Cedefop's Strategic Positioning: Being Relevant to Needs and Adding Policy Value

To begin to address this bundle of questions we have to set out first of all what it is that Cedefop has seen itself as trying to achieve over the period for the study. We then have to test this perception of the overall mission in terms of what the "client base" is perceived to be and what elements among Cedefop's declared objectives are seen as having been most relevant and have added the greatest value.

Figure 4.1 The overall shape of the Cedefop mission: the intervention logic

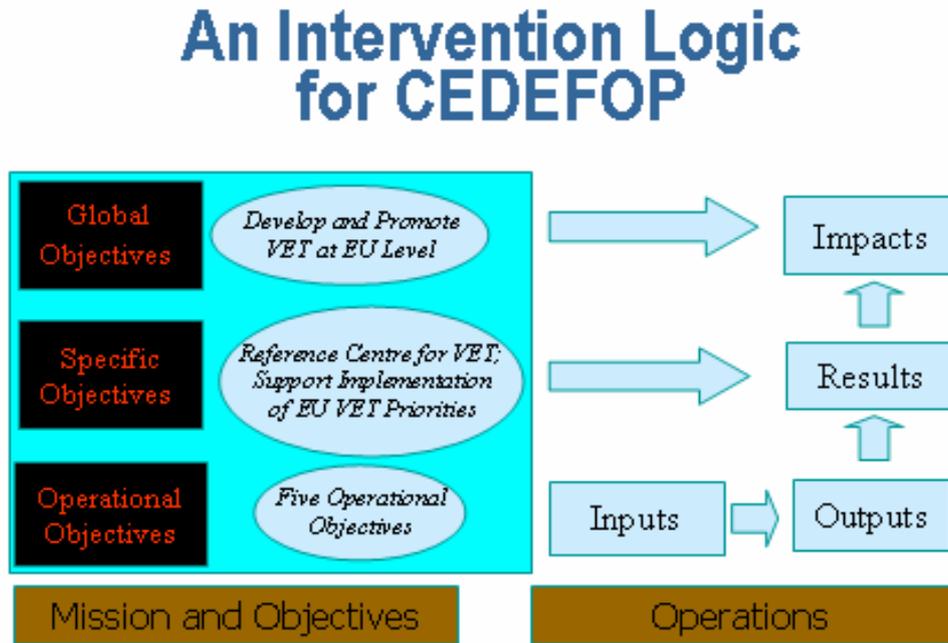


Figure 4.1 offers a diagrammatic view of the intervention logic for Cedefop. In a simplified format this sets out a picture of the objectives the organisation at the present time in relation to the mandate set out in the founding regulation. The figure also enables us to show how this fits into the logic of evaluation. We have shown the set of objectives in global, specific and operational form.

The global objective is the founding regulation and it is against this that the overall impact of Cedefop must be measured. Did it have a measurable and significant effect on the promotion and development at European level? (We shall address this particularly in Chapter Six)

The specific objectives capture two critical dimensions of the Cedefop approach - *acting as a reference centre for VET* and *supporting the implementation of EU VET priorities*. Seen one way, both objectives acting in concert can give Cedefop a distinctiveness of approach in the way the VET community is served. But, from another perspective, these two strategic objectives can also be seen as countervailing poles of difference in organisational philosophy that can make compromise difficult. The key questions here are – how effective was Cedefop in delivering each specific objective individually and was the

right balance between the two achieved to give the best possible effectiveness overall? (We address these issues in this Chapter)

The five operational objectives are those that shaped the activities of Cedefop and the questions to be asked here are about efficiency and effectiveness in operation. They were

- 1) *Carrying out research in European VET systems & issues*
- 2) *Reporting, Collecting, Analysing VET information at EU level*
- 3) *Disseminating VET information across Europe*
- 4) *Providing technical and scientific advice*
- 5) Promoting co-operation & exchanges of best practice

(We address these objectives in what follows in respect of broad strategy and in Chapter Five in terms of operational management)

The over-arching strategic issue is whether there has been the right configuration of global, specific and operational objectives to carry out the mission set out in Cedefop's overall mandate. Operationally the question is whether these have been delivered at quality and with reasonable effectiveness and efficiency. We will explore this more comprehensively later when we come to our conclusions and recommendations. Our focus in what follows here is with what we have called the two *specific* objectives and with some broad views on each of the five *operational objectives*, and we will begin with some broad observations on how well Cedefop is valued overall by its user community. However, before doing so we need to reflect critically on the key elements of the intervention logic and their inter-linkages.

First of all, we can observe that both the general and specific objectives are in a sense highly generalised but that the specific objectives do reflect the two fundamental roles that the organisation seeks to perform, as noted above. Below these two sets of objectives, the operational objectives flow logically: they are coherent and all link logically to the specific objectives, being relevant for an organisation that wishes to act as a reference centre and to support the implementation of EU VET priorities. On the whole, therefore, the different sets of objectives form a coherent whole. Looking across the operational objectives, our only caveat would concern the provision of technical and scientific advice. It is not obvious what this comprises nor what its role would be, and as we see below, this ambiguity is indeed reflected in the views of many of Cedefop's customers.

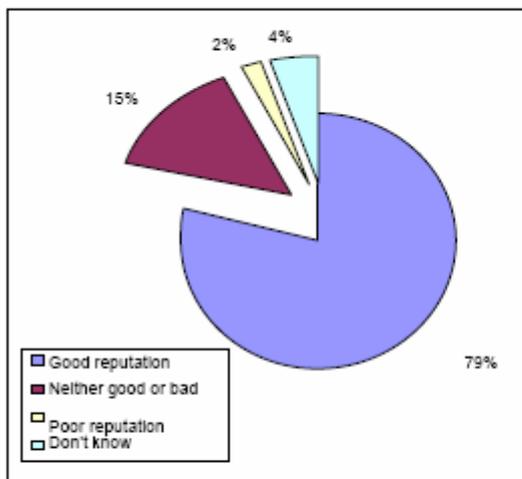
4.3 Measuring the perceived value of Cedefop as a reference centre and an agency for supporting the implementation of EU VET priorities – the specific objectives

Undoubtedly Cedefop has performed a critical role in acting as a vital resource to the wider VET community over the years since its foundation. This is a key dimension of its active strategy and we have been able to assemble a wide array of evidence to show that this is still a much-valued function. We depend for our analysis here on two primary sources. The first is the web-survey of users and the second the survey of intermediary bodies (the details of each survey are set out in Annexe Three). What we want to do in what follows is to try to bring them together to answer some of the most fundamental questions for the evaluation. We begin at the most general level with the issue of Cedefop's *reputation*.

4.3.1 The value of the brand and the reputation

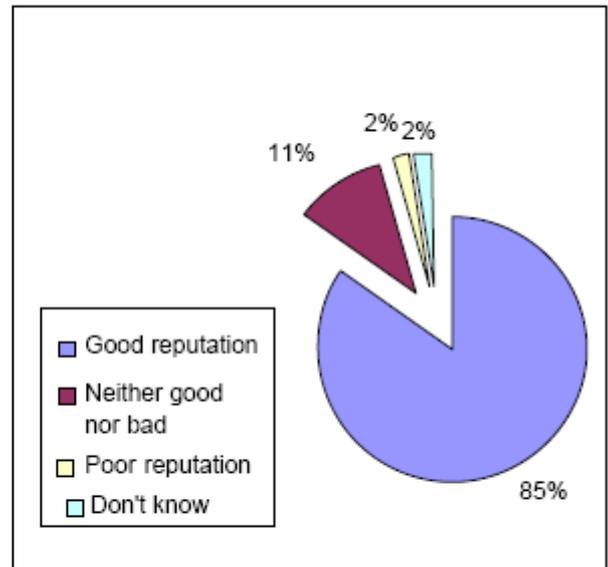
Perhaps the simplest entry point to the material on Cedefop as a reference centre and support for policy implementation in European VET is to look at how the organisation is perceived in the most general terms as a "brand-identity". We sought to recover from the two surveys a robust notion of how Cedefop is seen by the VET community at large and, from these we can offer a clear view from answers to the question 'do you think that Cedefop has a good reputation / 'brand-name' in the EU Vocational Education and Training (VET) market?' The responses, as Figures 4.2 and 4.3 show, were unequivocal. Around four-fifths of respondents to the user survey and 85 percent of respondents among the intermediary bodies felt that Cedefop has a "good reputation" in the European VET market.

Figure 4.2 User perspectives of Cedefop's reputation in the EU VET market, 2007



Source: ECOTEC Research & Consulting, 2007 (survey among users of Cedefop's products and services)

Figure 4.3 Intermediary bodies' perspectives of Cedefop's reputation in the EU VET market, 2007



Source: ECOTEC Research & Consulting, 2007 (Intermediary Body survey)

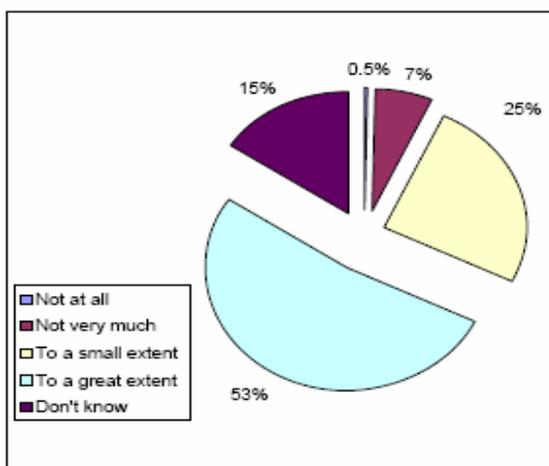
Positive feedback on the reputation and visibility of Cedefop was also received from the face-to-face interviews carried out with the smaller number (12) of key policy-makers, VET researchers and VET practitioners. The essence of the user view is that Cedefop is the only body documenting the VET system in Europe as a whole and its role as moderator and coordinator is of considerable value. Indeed, the feeling was if it did not exist, Cedefop or something very like it would need to be invented. This is not to say, of course, that there were no suggestions about where the reputation and visibility could be improved – and we shall return to this later – but overall the sheer weight of the positive responses can speak for itself – Cedefop has a strong brand reputation in the field of European VET.

4.3.2 Meeting the needs and expectations of users: the broad profile

Having unequivocally established the high profile of the organisation as a "brand-identity", the evidence enabled us to probe more deeply into how far Cedefop could be seen as meeting the array of different needs placed on it by its different groups of users. Data from the web-survey of users shows (Figure 4.4) that 53 percent saw Cedefop as meeting the needs of its users "to a great extent".

Figure 4.4 User survey perspectives on products and services meeting needs

(In your view, do the products and services of Cedefop meet the needs of its users?)

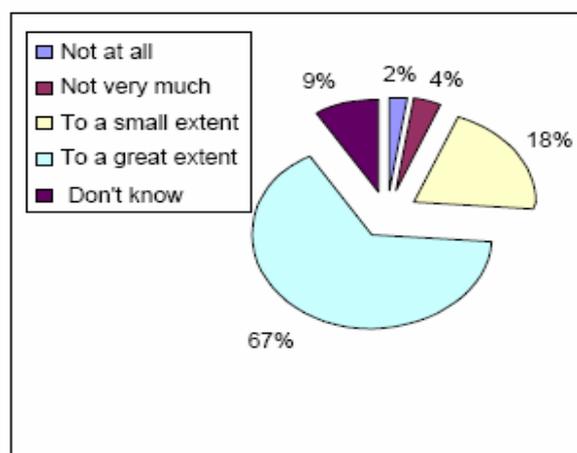


Source: ECOTEC Research & Consulting, 2007 (survey among users of Cedefop's products and services)

Note: Based on 428 responses (response rate to this question 72%).

Figure 4.5 Intermediary body survey perspectives on products and services meeting needs

(In your view, do the products and services of Cedefop meet the needs of its users?)



Source: ECOTEC Research & Consulting 2007 (Intermediary Body survey)

Asking the same question of the intermediary bodies produces the result shown in Figure 4.5 above. Once again there is broad satisfaction at this general level with even more - 67 percent - of respondents indicating that Cedefop meets user needs for products and services "to a great extent".

We were also able to probe a little deeper into the question of what *specifically* the wider VET community valued most in the array of products and services Cedefop delivered. To set this analysis up we took advantage of the typology of objectives and corresponding outputs proposed in the meta-evaluation of EU agencies (European Commission, DG Budget, 2003, p.35). This is a set of generic "typical objectives, tasks and outputs of Community Agencies" ordered into four major groups - three of which are particularly appropriate to our subject here³¹. Group A, for example, assembles those objectives to do with collecting and processing information and carrying out and promoting research studies. Group B is about the dissemination process and the provision of advice, reports and informed opinions and Group C deals with co-operation and exchange and exchange of information and best practice. As a set they offer a very clear template for what

³¹ The fourth group is about the direct implementation of actions and is not applicable to Cedefop in the form in which it is drafted.

Cedefop has been set up to do as a Community Agency and they lend an objective framework against which to evaluate user opinions. What we have done in the analysis is to convert them into a set of questions framed as follows: 'In your opinion, to what extent is Cedefop successful in achieving (each of) the following objectives?' -

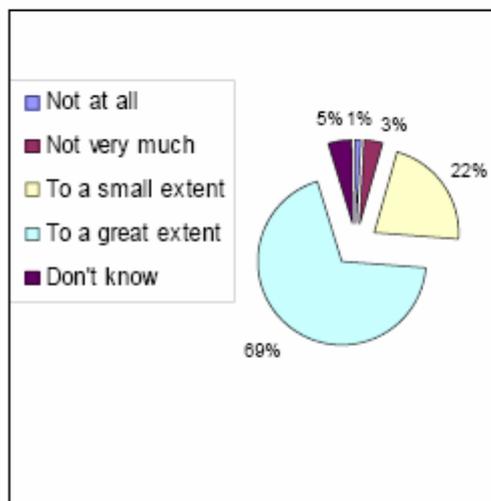
- a. Improved flow of VET information and increased opportunities for the exchange of experience and good practice;
- b. Improved information services on VET being available to organisations and individuals across Europe;
- c. Objective, reliable, comparable VET information and data being available to organisations and individuals across Europe
- d. Availability of sound and independent scientific advice on specific technical or scientific issues in the VET field
- e. Efficient and effective implementation of Community programmes and/or EU policy initiatives in the VET field

We take each of these in turn to capture a view of the impressions of the users of Cedefop and then look across the set at the end to see where the perceived balance of Cedefop's value lies.

a. Improved flow of VET information and increased opportunities for the exchange of experience and good practice;

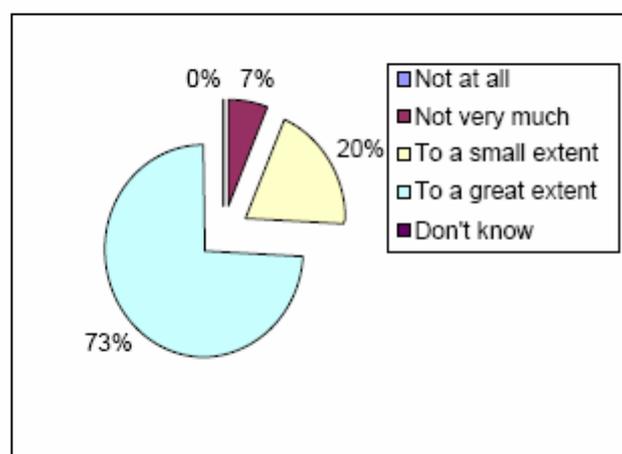
From the perspective of the user survey, nearly 70 per cent of users of Cedefop's products and services felt that the Centre has played a significant role in increasing opportunities for the exchange of experience and good practice.

Figure 4.6 User survey perspectives on Cedefop's contribution to improved flow of VET information and the exchange of experience and good practice



Source: ECOTEC Research & Consulting, 2007 (survey among users of Cedefop's products and services)
 Note: Based on 421 responses (response rate to this question 71%)

Figure 4.7 Intermediary body survey perspectives on Cedefop's contribution to improved flow of VET information and the exchange of experience and good practice



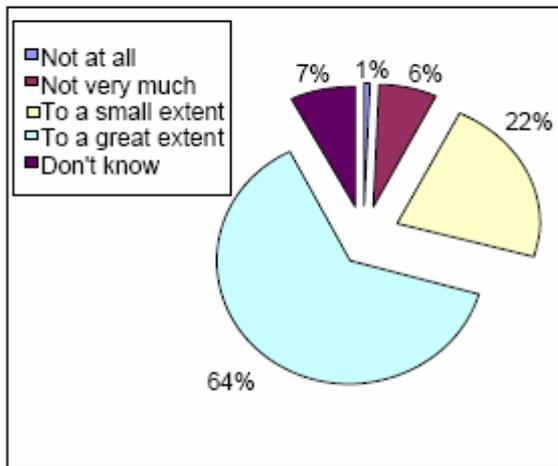
Source: ECOTEC Research & Consulting, 2007 (Intermediary Body survey)
 Note: Based on 46 responses.

The intermediary bodies' survey confirms this view - with 73% of respondents holding the view that Cedefop activities have contributed 'to a great extent' to information flow and exchange of experience on good practice. This is the highest among the percentage responses by the IBs for the five categories under exploration - giving an indication that they value this aspect of Cedefop's work most highly.

b. Improved information services on VET being available to organisations and individuals across Europe;

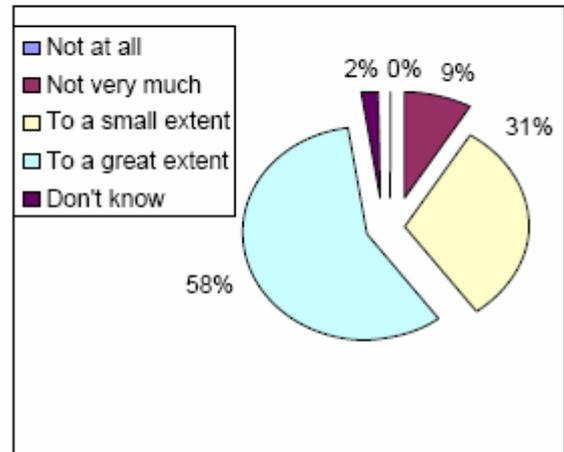
This is very much a core function for Cedefop and has been since its original foundation. This is what we will refer to many times throughout the report as the "open source" activity where the scope of information services encompasses both individuals and organisations. Once again the web-survey of users confirms that over 64 percent see the organisation as successful in achieving this objective "to a great extent".

Figure 4.8 User survey perspectives on Cedefop's contribution to improved information services on VET being available organisations and individuals across Europe



Source: ECOTEC Research & Consulting, 2007 (survey among users of Cedefop's products and services)
 Note: Based on 421 responses (response rate to this question 71%).

Figure 4.9 Intermediary body survey perspectives on Cedefop's contribution to improved information services on VET being available to organisations and individuals across Europe



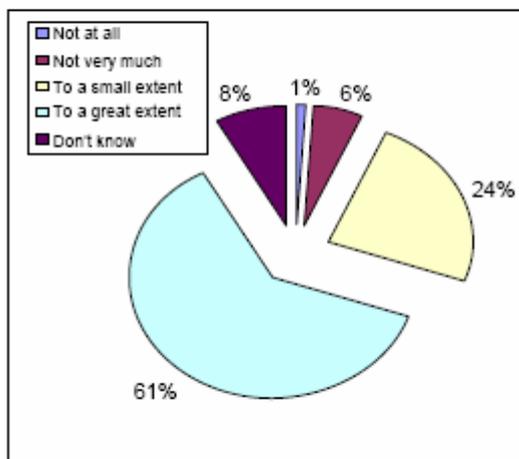
Source: ECOTEC Research & Consulting, 2007 (Intermediary Body survey)
 Note: Based on 45 responses (response rate to this question 69%).

In comparison with the user survey, the IB survey is a little less positive in this case with only 58% of respondents considering that Cedefop activities contribute 'to a great extent' in this area of the wide-scale provision of information services. Looking at the responses in more detail we can see that there is a distinctly positive bias in answering from the NLOs/TSAs (67% 'to a great extent'). By contrast only 50% the ReferNet Cells responses saw Cedefop as improving VET information services "to a great extent", through this open source approach. We shall return to the ReferNet case in Chapter Seven.

c. Objective, reliable, comparable VET information and data being available to organisations and individuals across Europe

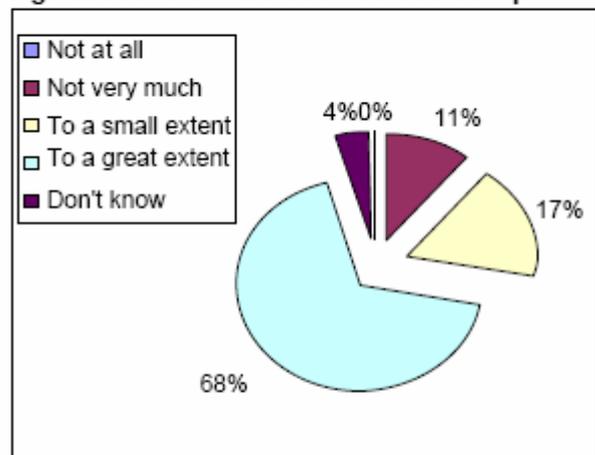
The essential difference between this categorisation of the objectives for Cedefop and the one we have just discussed is the emphasis on *objectivity, reliability and comparability* of the information and data. Once again a little over 60 percent of the users responding to the web-survey are recorded as agreeing that Cedefop meets this more stringent objective "to a great extent".

Figure 4.10 User survey perspectives on Cedefop's contribution to objective, reliable, comparable VET information and data being available to organisations & individuals across Europe



Source: ECOTEC Research & Consulting, 2007 (survey among users of Cedefop's products and services)
 Note: Based on 416 responses (response rate to this question ~ 70.2%).

Figure 4.11 Intermediary body survey perspectives on Cedefop's contribution to objective, reliable, comparable VET information and data being available to organisations & individuals across Europe



Source: ECOTEC Research & Consulting, 2007 (Intermediary Body survey)
 Note: Based on 46 responses (response rate to this question 71%).

The responses from the IB Survey are even more positive in this case. Some 68% of intermediary body respondents note that Cedefop activities have contributed 'to a great extent' to 'objective, reliable, comparable VET information being made available to organisations & individuals across Europe'. This time the most positive feedback comes from the TTNNet Members (80% 'to a great extent'), followed by the NLOs/TSAs (67%).

Once again the ReferNet Cells report a more modest – but still satisfactory - 60%.

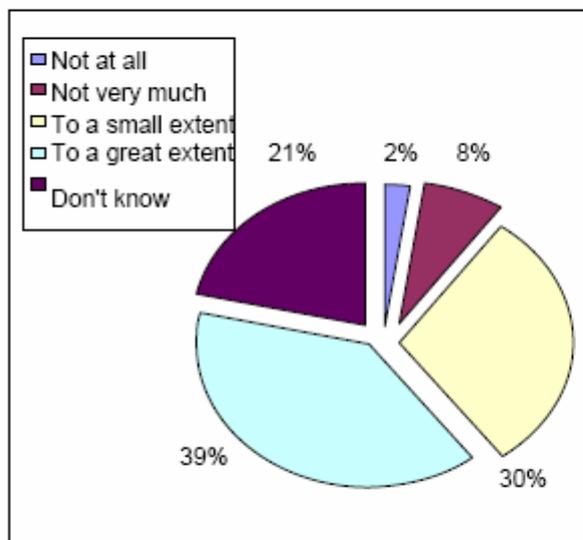
d. Availability of sound and independent scientific advice on specific technical or scientific issues in the VET field

As we noted in the preceding section, the operational objective covering the provision of technical and scientific advice struck us as ambiguous within the organisation's intervention logic. What did users think of this part of the Cedefop portfolio?

For the first time in this case the user survey shows a much less enthusiastic confirmation that Cedefop is successful in this regard. Offering *scientific advice and support on specific technical or scientific issues* is not so clearly seen as a strong suit for the organisation in the eyes of its users. Many (21%) cannot express a view and there is a much narrower gap between the categories "to a small extent" and "to a great extent" than elsewhere with only 39 percent in the latter category. We believe that this may have to do with the fact that users cannot make the connection between what is asked in the question and what they see Cedefop as doing in this area. While such things as Europass, EQF and other "tools" that we will explore later might reasonably sit under this heading we are not sure that they see the organisation as "offering scientific advice" in the way the question frames it. This is an issue raised in the interviews. Respondents are undoubtedly aware of the tools but are less clear about the extent of Cedefop's contribution.

The pattern is repeated in the IB Survey with a much wider range of opinions expressed and only 36 percent opting for the "to a great extent" category. This is the least highly scored of all the IB contributions in respect of meeting objectives. The most positive feedback comes from the TNet Members (50% 'to a great extent'), followed by the NLOs/TSAs (41%). The ReferNet Cells record only 20%. This could again be explained by the low recognition/ visibility Cedefop gains for its activities related to offering technical and scientific advice and support. Examples include Cedefop's role in supporting EU VET tools and instruments, such as the European CV hosted on the ETV website.

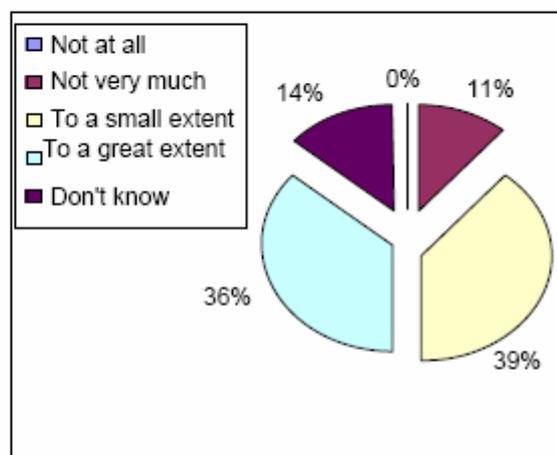
Figure 4.12 User survey perspectives on Cedefop's contribution to availability of sound and independent scientific advice on specific technical or scientific issues in the VET field



Source: ECOTEC Research & Consulting, 2007 (survey among users of Cedefop's products and services)

Note: Based on 418 responses (response rate to this question 71%).

Figure 4.13 Intermediary body survey perspectives on Cedefop's contribution to availability of sound and independent scientific advice on specific technical or scientific issues in the VET field



Source: ECOTEC Research & Consulting, 2007 (Intermediary Body survey)

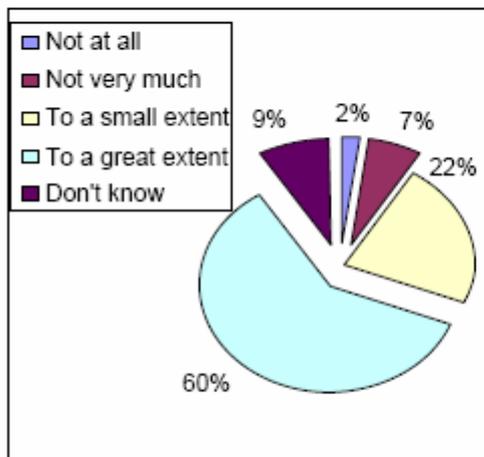
Note: Based on 44 responses (response rate to this question 68%).

e. Efficient and effective implementation of Community programmes and/or EU policy initiatives in the VET field

This dimension of the analytical framework for looking at user views on the value of Cedefop weighs much more heavily on the *second specific objective* – assisting with policy development and implementation – than on the role of the organisation as an open source reference centre. We will have much more to say about this in Chapter Five but for our present purposes we will continue to report the findings from the web surveys. Figure 4.14 shows a rather different pattern of response from those we have just seen from the wide community of users (with the exception of scientific and technical advice). What is clear here is that users are *much less clear* about Cedefop in this role – for example 22% simply “don’t know” either what they are being asked or what Cedefop is actually doing in this area. Indeed, there is for the first time an overall majority of views in the quadrant of the chart ranging from “don’t know” through to meeting the objective “to a small extent”. Only 46% of responses see Cedefop as meeting the “policy implementation” objective “to a great extent”.

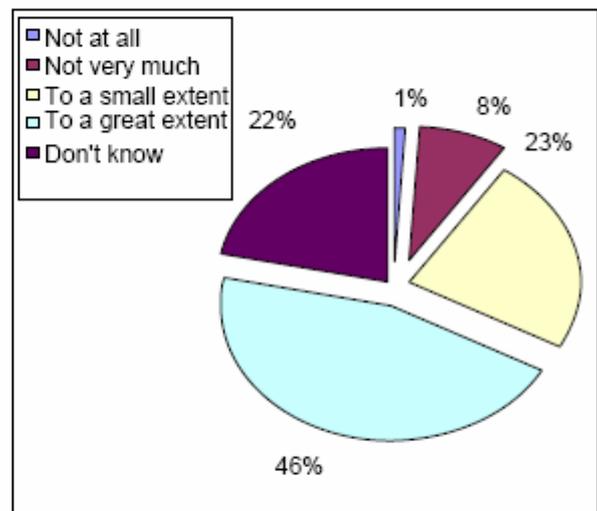
When we come to the opinions of the intermediary bodies, however, the story is quite different. Only 9% record a “don’t know” and over 80 percent believe that Cedefop is making some sort of "policy implementation" impact with as many as 60% seeing this in the category “to a great extent”. It is here, perhaps, where we see the strongest evidence for the way Cedefop finds itself arrayed across two kinds of communities of interest with rather different views of what it should be there for. On the one hand the individual users privilege its role as an open source provider of information, intelligence and best practice. On the other hand, it is clear from Figure 4.15 that the IB users have a much more positive view of Cedefop as a contributor to policy development and implementation. This is perhaps no more than would be expected since, while the IBs can be expected to have a role in and a view of policy, direct users will have no necessary reason to see the value of the organisation through this lens.

Figure 4.14 Intermediary body perspectives on Cedefop's contribution to efficient and effective implementation of Community programmes and/or EU policy initiatives in the VET field



Source: ECOTEC Research & Consulting, 2007 (Intermediate Body survey)
 Note: Based on 45 responses (response rate to this question ~ 69.2%).

Figure 4.15 User perspectives on Cedefop's contribution to efficient and effective implementation of Community programmes and/or EU policy initiatives in the VET field

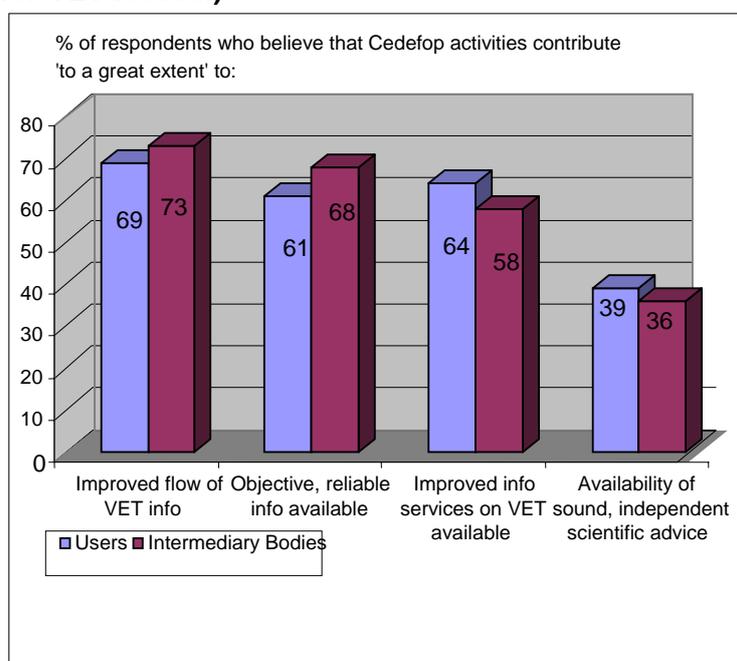


Source: ECOTEC Research & Consulting, 2007 (survey among users of Cedefop's products and services)
 Note: Based on 418 responses (response rate to this question 71%).

4.3.3 Summary: Meeting the specific objectives: the views of users and intermediary bodies

At the end of this section we are now in a position to make some basic observations on how well, in the view of its user community, Cedefop was meeting its two specific objectives. Figure 4.16 looks across four types of results that are central to the long-standing mission of Cedefop to act as a reference centre for European VET. It is abundantly clear that both the user community and the intermediary bodies value the activities of the organisation consistently very highly in relation to three objectives with the contribution on independent scientific advice less clearly recognised. On balance, then, the traditional "open source" mission of Cedefop appears to be both highly valued and well-found in terms of the way it is carried it out.

Figure 4.16 User and Intermediary Body Perspectives on the Success of Cedefop in Attaining Results Relevant to Specific Objective 1 (To provide support as a reference centre for VET issues.)

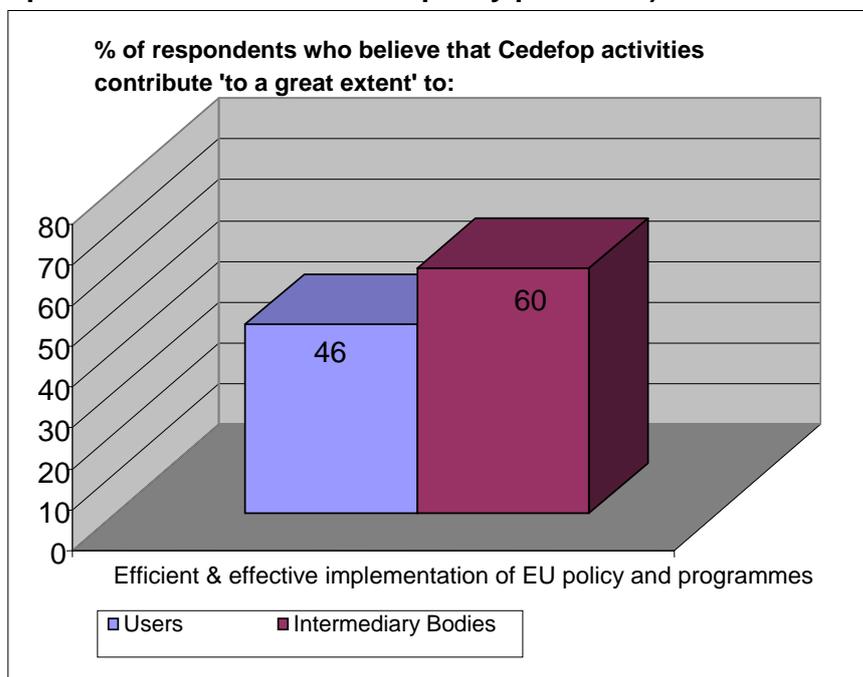


Source: ECOTEC Research & Consulting, 2007 (User survey, Intermediary Body survey).

When it comes to the part of the mission that has to do with contributing to and supporting the implementation of EU VET policy priorities there is certainly less enthusiasm from the wide user population and, by comparison with the "open source" perspectives in Figure 4.17 even the intermediary bodies, though positive, are less emphatically so. There is a hint here of the process that has been taking place since 2005 in particular, for Cedefop to reposition more towards the policy development and implementation role and to redefine its relationship with its traditional client groups. Perhaps what we are observing in Figure

4.17 is that the organisation has not yet taken its traditional constituency along with it as it has moved to exercise greater influence on VET policy development across Europe at the macro-level. The intermediary bodies, as would be expected, appear to have a clearer perception of what Cedefop is doing in this respect but the wider constituency of users seems less convinced of the added value that this dimension of the strategy offers them. It would be premature on the basis of the evidence in front of us at this stage in the report to make too much of this but it is an issue that will reappear as we look to other sorts of user feedback.

Figure 4.17 User and Intermediary Body Perspectives on the Success of Cedefop in Attaining Results Relevant to Specific Objective 2 (i.e. ‘to contribute to and support the implementation of the EU VET policy priorities’)



Source: ECOTEC Research & Consulting, 2007 (User survey, Intermediary Body survey)

4.4 Measuring the perceived value of Cedefop as a reference centre and an agency for supporting the implementation of EU VET priorities – the operational objectives

4.4.1 User views on operational objectives

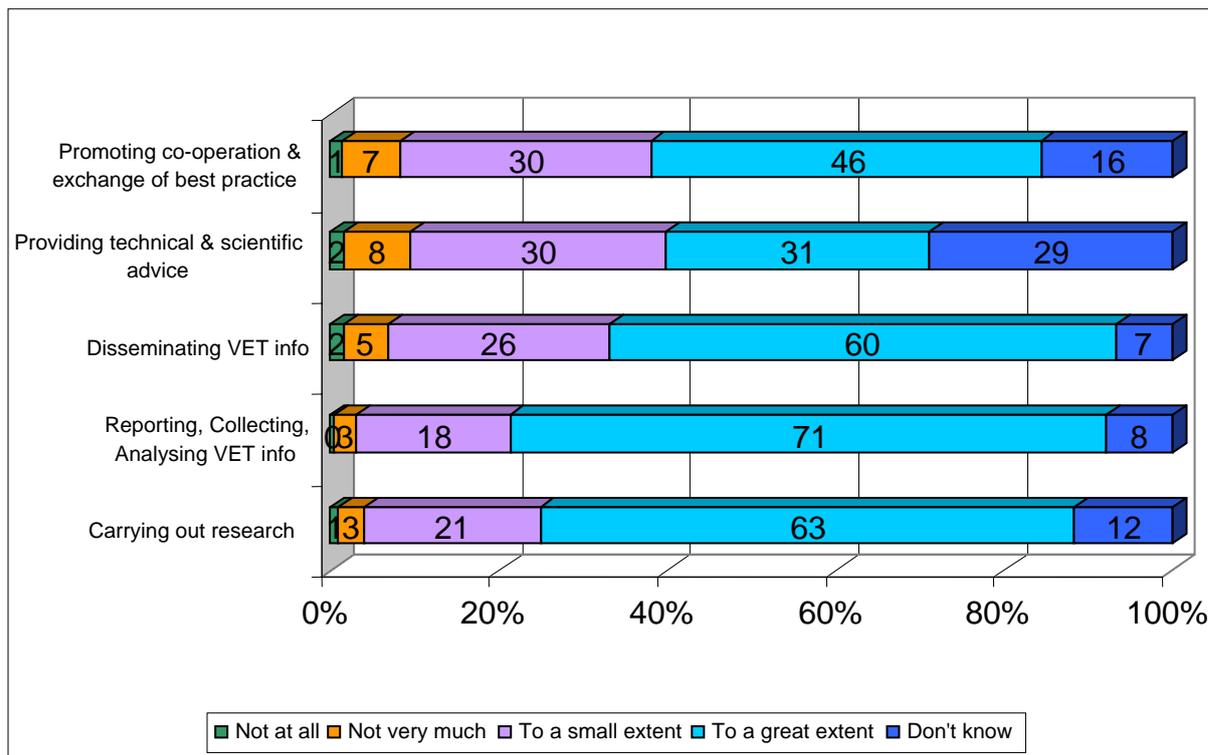
At this point, even at the expense of a little confusion, we need to introduce a differently expressed set of objectives from the ones we have just been using. These are the *operational objectives* that Cedefop recognises as those that drive its current organisational activities. We shall be using them again in Chapter 5. Of course, they are

closely informed by the typology we have been using for the actions of Community Agencies in general and they frame Cedefop as doing the same things overall. But in detail the operational objectives are expressed in a slightly different way as follows:

- 1) Carrying out research in European VET systems & issues*
- 2) Reporting, Collecting, Analysing VET information at EU level*
- 3) Disseminating VET information across Europe*
- 4) Providing technical and scientific advice*
- 5) Promoting co-operation & exchanges of best practice*

What will be noticeable here is that there is no reference in the list to support for EU policy development and implementation. This is because it ranks as an objective of different order in the way the organisation now sees its mission. In response to this we have raised it to the level of a specific objective of higher order and will give it particular weight in Chapter Six when we look at it through the lens of a particular case study. Figure 4.18 reports responses to these slightly different objectives in the same way as before by using answers to the question "do you think Cedefop has been successful in achieving (each of) its key objectives?"

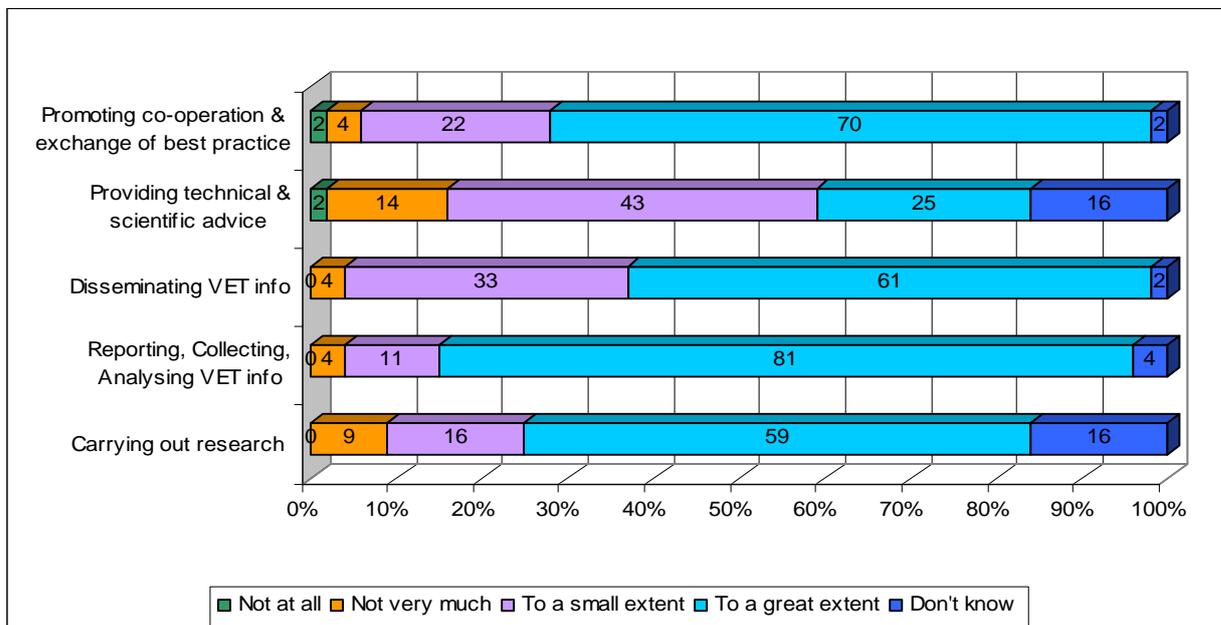
Figure 4.18 User Perspectives on the Success of Cedefop in Achieving its Operational Objectives – Comparative Analysis



Source: ECOTEC Research & Consulting 2007 (survey among users of Cedefop's products and services)

What is obvious in this case is that Cedefop, as is now becoming clear through all the data, is most closely identified by its user population as being a valued source for reporting, collecting and analysing VET information at European level. Users then identify Cedefop as having a role in carrying out research on VET systems and issues in Europe (a category we have not used before) and as a vehicle for disseminating VET information. As we have already seen, the wider user community is less attuned to Cedefop's operational objectives for promoting co-operation and best practice and in providing technical and scientific advice and support.

Figure 4.19 Intermediary Bodies' Perspectives on the Success of Cedefop in Achieving its Operational Objectives – Comparative Analysis



Source: ECOTEC Research & Consulting 2007 (Intermediary Body survey)

As Figure 4.19 shows the intermediary bodies working with Cedefop believe it is most successful in reporting, collecting and analysing VET information at EU level and in promoting cooperation and exchange of best practice. This is unsurprising considering that the day to day work of most IB respondents revolves around Cedefop's exchange/cooperation (eg Study Visit NLOs) and reporting activities (eg ReferNet national coordinators) and as a result, IBs are inevitably more aware of Cedefop's role in these areas.

4.5 Meeting users' overall expectations: other viewpoints

To round off this section of the report we want to explore, by way of a summary, what we have learned about general impressions of where Cedefop sits in relation to the expectations of different groups in its user community. We have already captured a synoptic view from the user survey and the intermediary bodies' survey but in this section we want to open the door to a summary view of those voices that came to us through less quantitative methods – the additional "write in" material from responses to the two questionnaires and the material from the key stakeholder interviews. This gives us an opportunity to add some more specificity to those questions we set out at the beginning of the Chapter. We cannot report this material in full but what we have done is to extract clusters of observations that seem to address particular issues that we can explore as the report develops. The most helpful of these "soft" comments are those buttressed by other

sources of evidence or that will add colour to evidence that emerges from other sources. For consistency we begin with those views of that came from the additional "write in" observations on the user survey returns.

4.5.1 Views from the wider user community

Despite the overall positive views on Cedefop's work that we have just set out, a number of users commented on the need of Cedefop to focus on developing its strongest areas and being much clearer about its strategic objectives. Along the same line there was a belief that Cedefop should focus its attention and resources more closely on the transfer of best practice. To add to this there were suggestions that while Cedefop offers good services, it seems less able to present all these services "in a coherent and logical manner". There was strong user support for the proposition that the activities of Cedefop need to be modified to keep up with changing circumstances in Europe and to take account of the accession of the Eastern EU states.

4.5.2 Views from the Intermediary Bodies

Respondents among the Intermediate Bodies generally agreed that Cedefop "*effectively facilitates the provision of information on current developments in the VET field*" - policy, statistics, research and initiatives at national and EU level. It is seen as having contributed significantly to the development of VET and is a valuable vehicle "*enabling countries to exchange information on current issues related to VET*". Once again the call from the IBs reinforces the view that, while Cedefop is not necessarily missing out desired activities, it needs to "*prioritise those that it does undertake to deliver better value in the most strategic areas*". The dissemination of publications is seen as the weakest point by a number of the write in comments from the IBs. There were suggestions that publications should be free of charge (quoting in one case Eurydice publications where only one is apparently not free). The timing of the publications is also regarded as an important issue: '*The surveys are done at the height of interest in the topics, but the publications come out when it has already diminished*'. Some suggest that dissemination should also be focused on those (levels) less familiar with Cedefop and its work (e.g. local level, practitioners). As pointed out by one respondent: '*Dissemination could once in a while take a form which is more digestible for others than policy makers who are familiar with the policies and jargon*'.

4.5.3 Views from other interviewees:

As we have already seen, Cedefop was set up as a body to facilitate information sharing but also to develop the technical expertise in order to share information. There is a general impression across the full set of interviewees canvassed during the project that Cedefop is viewed as a strategic player in the field of VET. Further, our limited consultation with the

DGVTs indicated that there is a general, and genuinely held regard for the work of Cedefop and for the way in which the new management is re-focusing its activities among the relevant national level VET policy makers.

There were, however, querulous voices in some quarters about the evolving role of Cedefop as providing support for the Commission (DGEAC in particular) as opposed to disseminating information on VET systems and practices to the wider community. By contrast, there are also those (among Cedefop staff) who would like to see a better recognition of this special relationship with DGEAC as a way of raising the profile of the organisation and its mission. Increasingly perhaps, the activities of Cedefop are being seen to serve the needs of the Commission and Member States at a political level, but the extent to which it is able to serve the needs of other key VET policy stakeholders, mainly VET providers, is in the eyes of some respondents "becoming questionable". Whatever these respondents say, however, there is little hard evidence from this report that as yet their pessimism is well founded. All of this raises the sorts of issues of focus and strategy that we shall be addressing in Chapter 5.

4.6 Cedefop's Strategic Position in relation to Other Agencies: the Issue of Complementarity

Having examined both the objectives of Cedefop and the extent to which its users perceive that it is achieving them, we are now in a position, before we draw this chapter to a close, to turn to another issue which is of strategic importance to the organisation, namely – in evaluation terms - its complementarity. Here the relevant question is *“to what extent does the organisation duplicate or complement the work of other agencies – both strategically and operationally?”* In addressing this question, we draw on findings from both our web surveys and interviews with stakeholders.

First, there is a general perception that Cedefop fits in well with its peers and co-actors. For example, the IB survey showed that 84% of respondents considered that Cedefop activities complement those of other national and international actors in VET (50% 'to a great extent' and 34% 'to a small extent'). The most positive ratings come from the Study Visit NLOs and TSAs (55% of which responded 'to a great extent').

Turning to the more specific issue of Cedefop's 'fit' in relation to other organisations, we have given consideration to two agencies: the European Training Foundation (ETF) and the European Foundation for the Improvement of Living and Working Conditions. When questioned about the degree to which Cedefop activities complement or overlap with those of the ETF, both Cedefop staff and Governing Board interviewees believe that there is a

well established cooperation with ETF and that the remits of the two institutions are clearly distinct (with the ETF supporting non-EU Member States and with Cedefop focusing on EU Member States) hence avoiding duplication of effort. The interviews also provided very positive feedback on the way the transition of the twelve New Member States from the ETF to Cedefop's remit has been handled. From Cedefop's perspective, ETF uses Cedefop as a source of information and best practice in VET in the EU and there is no functional overlap between the work of the two institutions. Cedefop benefits from the ETF's experience both in candidate countries and third countries.

It is also interesting to consider the complementarity between the work of Cedefop and that of the European Foundation for Living and Working Conditions (EuroFound), since both agencies were set up on the initiative of the social partners. Several interviewees, especially Governing Board members representing the social partners, believe that there are many synergies that could be taken advantage of if Cedefop co-operated more closely with Eurofound, recognising that cooperation between Cedefop and Eurofound has to continue improving. To put these comments in the context of recent developments, the evaluation notes that a Cooperation Agreement between Cedefop and Eurofound was made in 2006 (see Cedefop Annual Report 2006). There it is indicated that both institutions are supporting the Lisbon strategy and the process of announced cooperation in vocational education and training: Eurofound in terms of employment strategy and Cedefop in terms of developing training policies and systems at European level. Activities will be implemented around promoting and developing exchanges of information and approaches with a view to elaborating common research and reporting activities designed to provide strategic target groups with support in matters relating both to industrial relations and to lifelong learning policies; exploration of the development of common research tools and activities in lifelong learning and working and living conditions; cooperation in the scientific committees and the advice and guidance networks in which both networks are involved and common events and peer-learning activities.

At an operational level, insights into the issue of complementarity can be gleaned from comparing Cedefop's networking activity with similar European networks, in particular Cedefop's ReferNet vis-à-vis the Eurydice network in the field of higher education. These are the only two networks covering European education and training systems. The two networks cooperate in the production of comprehensive overviews of European educational systems such as the "structures of education, vocational training and adult education systems in Europe". Even though there is a memorandum of understanding between Cedefop and Eurydice, external interviewees have reported that the extent of cooperation differs by country. In cases like Finland where the responsibility for Eurydice and ReferNet lies within the same organisation, this clearly diminishes duplication of the work and ensures better synergies between the work of ReferNet and Eurydice networks.

However, this view is not the case in all countries, where some interviewees felt that they sometimes have to do double work to respond to Eurydice and Cedefop requests for similar information.

We understand by the above that Cedefop is consciously working on avoiding duplication with other institutions and clearly delineating its activities in order to complement and not duplicate efforts. This is evidenced by the fact that Cedefop has signed Cooperation Agreements with key complementary agencies such as the ETF and Eurofound. However, Cedefop should continue to be vigilant to avoid replication of activity in particular vis-à-vis the Eurydice network.

4.7 Summary: Meeting User Needs and Achieving the Right Balance

What we have just seen is a report on how the wide-ranging community that sees itself as the client base for Cedefop perceives Cedefop. Overall, it is undoubtedly the case that the impression of its activities is a favourable one. For the most part user perceptions of the extent to which Cedefop is meeting the broad range of objectives set out for it are highly favourable. Put simply the bulk of the responses show that Cedefop is doing a "good job". What we have also been able to see from this section of the report are some hints that users have significantly different views on what they value most within the overall portfolio of activities. Part of the strategic difficulty that Cedefop has to confront as an organisation is that the brief set for it by the 1975 Regulation is both very broad and open to wide flexibility in interpretation. As we have indicated earlier, this provides the Governing Board and Directorate with both advantages and disadvantages. On the one hand there is the flexibility to respond to a changing world, while on the other there is an open invitation to the user constituency to see Cedefop as available to meet their particular needs. What we have just seen is perhaps reasonably interpreted as the organisation spreading itself sufficiently widely to evoke good feedback across the board. What we can also perceive is that - satisfactory as this approach appears to be to the users in the most general terms - it can also tend to fix the organisation into being a largely reactive provider of on-demand services. This we see as the driving ethos of the early years and it is interesting to repeat what we reported earlier about the findings of the PLS Ramboll evaluation in 2001:

"... Cedefop was doing important work in the promotion and development of vocational education and training in the European context and (that) the Centre mostly focused on the right VET issues. A weakness (that we shall see repeated in this study) was that the Centre was trying to do too much, often being unable to set "negative priorities". It was considered that by becoming more focused, the Centre might increasingly be able both to set the agenda in the VET area and raise the visibility of the Centre".

Cedefop even in 2007 is still capable, as we have seen, of serving a very wide constituency with a very wide range of products and services to the satisfaction of the bulk of that community. Interestingly, where we have been able to explore responses to activities outside the reactive open source mission – supporting policy development and implementation and providing independent technical advice – the responses have been more muted. As we shall go on to show in the next Chapter, Cedefop has been trying to become both more strategically focussed and more proactive in policy development and implementation in recent years.

In terms of trying to keep the balance of interests right as this new focus beds in there is no evidence from the Chapter that users see that more traditional focus as having been seriously damaged but there is perhaps an argument that as strategy shifts, active steps might need to be taken to explain what is going on and to carry the user community with it.

5.0 Responding to New Priorities and Managing Change

5.1 Cedefop facing a period of change

As we saw in Chapter Two, the period since 2000 has been a highly significant phase in the development of VET in Europe. The adoption of the Lisbon agenda revolutionised the entire policy landscape including that for VET. It was Education and Training 2010 that set the new policy framework against which Cedefop and agencies like it had to adjust their strategic positioning and their day-to-day actions. The era of fragmented and ad hoc policy gave way to one where Member States signed up to a common policy agenda and took responsibility for reforming their own education and training systems. From 2002, the Copenhagen declaration set the terms of the reform process for VET and for the enhanced role of Member States. At Maastricht in 2004 and Helsinki in 2006 the process was further enhanced as priorities were set more clearly and ways of implementing them were established. These were to be carried out through *'the continued support of Cedefop and the European Training Foundation and their networks'*, especially in relation to monitoring progress in the priority areas and reporting on developments, and their *'close cooperation on statistics, indicators and benchmarks'*.

If enlargement after 2004 is added to the mix, then the world that Cedefop was being asked to confront over the review period for this study was dramatically changed in ways that demanded a strategic response from the organisation. A 1990s VET policy world full of variety, ad hoc responses and a chaotic assembly of players and actions gave way in the first half of the new decade to one where at the very least there were clear and agreed priorities that most signed up to. As we shall emphasise later, Cedefop was by no means a passive recipient of these changes – it was an active promoter and a participant at the highest levels in setting out the framework. Strategic re-positioning for the organisation over this period was a given in the face of changes in the roles of its key stakeholders – Member States, the Commission and the social partners – and in the growing emphasis through Lisbon and the OMC on mutual learning and the exchange of good practice. It simply could not expect to stand still and hope to meet the new circumstances. But, as we shall again go on to see, this was not an easy time for Cedefop as an organisation and its response was deflected by issues of internal governance and management.

5.2 Strategic positioning to respond to change

Box Two set out the sorts of questions we want to explore here in terms of the formal language of evaluation as we have set them out in Annexe One. This Chapter is based on documentation research as well as the soft input collected from the two web surveys and interviews.

BOX TWO

The Key Evaluation Questions for this Section of the Report

Relevance: How far have Cedefop's objectives been moulded strategically to meet a changing pattern of need over time?

Added Value: Has Cedefop organised its portfolio of activities to achieve the best value in respect of alternative ways of delivering the same results?

5.2.1 The dilemma for strategy: developing and implementing policy versus open access

Stakeholder feedback from the interviews and discussions inside the organisation itself confirmed to us that a degree of re-positioning to meet the new European agenda for VET had indeed been taking place – though as we have just seen the wider user community remains largely content that the more traditional open source function seems to remain largely in situ. As a quadripartite organisation with a wide community of interest, the "pull and push" of different views is a matter of normal practice. But what we may be talking about here is a matter of two very different service philosophies bumping against each other. On the one hand there is a more market-oriented philosophy where client-consumer expressed preferences (organisation or individual) steer the service offer from the bottom up. On the other hand, there is a more public service philosophy where the policy delivery system is the focus of attention and where a top-down process predominates in the setting of priorities and the allocation of resources. Both can, of course, operate in tandem and there is an infinite possibility of hybrid forms - but mixing the two needs to be actively captured in strategy, if this is what Cedefop is trying to do, and engineered into practice.

It does seem that Cedefop has been making an attempt to re-position its strategy over the years since 2002 – patchy at first and then much more forceful and directed from 2005 onwards. This strategic shift, as we have seen in the last Chapter, is one that is still being played out in 2007. What is also clear is that – given the nature of the mandate for Cedefop – any change has still to be set *within* the overall framework of the broadly-drawn long-standing objectives set out in the founding regulation. There has not, so far as we

can see, been a wholly new realignment of those objectives to constitute a *substantially new mission*³². Despite this, however, the Commission and the key players in Cedefop now take the view that from 2005 onwards the organisation has become more coherently "positioned in its new role". But what we have already shown in Chapter 4 is that the wider user community still believes that the objectives most effectively carried out by Cedefop are those for *reporting, collecting, and analysing VET information at EU level; disseminating VET information across Europe and promoting co-operation and exchanges of best practice*. As our description of the intervention logic for Cedefop shows (Figure 4.1) if there is such a "new role" it has become essentially a *dual* one where the two specific objectives are being pursued in tandem. There is no problem with this, of course, so long as the level of resources can sustain it and where the pool of competency in the organisation can span both. Indeed, as we said earlier, doing both together can give a significant advantage in giving distinctiveness to the Cedefop brand. It is only where either or both of the resource and competency conditions is not met or where management cannot handle the complexity of a twin focus that this situation would give rise to concern. This is what we need to explore a little more deeply as the study proceeds.

5.2.2 Cedefop perspectives on strategic choice

In this section, what we want to do is to give some more detailed insight into contemporary views within Cedefop on these issues of strategy, balance, choice and re-positioning. We have at our disposal a series of face to face interviews with key members of the Directorate and the Board as well as the focus groups carried out with representatives of the Governing Bureau and with the staff. We begin with the Bureau focus group where the theme of the focus group session was on matters of choice, positioning and strategy.

Governing Bureau

The Bureau focus group confirmed the view that, before 2005, the ethos of Cedefop was still largely to continue its function as a reference centre – though increasingly influenced by the changes brought into play by Copenhagen after 2002. The early priority was on knowledge management systems designed to enhance user access to information and the later drive was to pursue the e-revolution through investment in the website, various portals and in its virtual communities. The aim at this stage was to move people towards being able to find their own information (for example on qualifications in foreign countries)

³² It was in response to what we had heard from Commission respondents and from senior players in Cedefop about the growing importance of policy development and implementation that we raised policy development and implementation from being just one operational objective among many to form a parallel specific objective alongside the role as a reference centre for VET.

rather than them having to use intermediaries such as researchers or other stakeholders to find this information.

After 2005, however, the Bureau group saw the strategic imperative having shifted more decisively to meet the objectives set by the key stakeholders– the Commission, Member State governments, employers' and employees' representatives - as opposed to the wider community of users. It was accepted that Cedefop still continued to serve the grassroots level – for example through tools such as Europass - but that the strategic emphasis had shifted toward the *support for policy development and implementation* function. There was general acceptance within the group that the organisation needed to redirect its strategic focus as the broader European VET environment became more coherently defined post-Copenhagen. The view was that there clearly was a gap to fill after 2002 for a high profile body with the experience and professional competence of Cedefop and the focus group suggested that there was little dissent among the stakeholders faced with the argument that, in order to fill it, the organisation needed to move away – to some degree - from its earlier "open source" philosophy. While in general terms the picture presented to us from the Bureau group was that there was "no significant tension" between the different groups of stakeholders on the Governing Board on matters of strategy the one area where there had been some lively debate was in respect of a possible move to become a centre for lifelong learning. When we look at the interviews with individual Board members a little later we shall see other big issues where, for some individuals at least, there was some strategic debate yet to be had.

The Directorate

Consistent with what we learned from the Bureau, the Directorate considered the chief current focus of Cedefop to be in supporting policy development and the implementation of EU VET priorities - still within the framework set by those wider-ranging objectives we discussed in Chapter 4. There is a strong preference in the Directorate for positioning Cedefop in the highest reaches of the policy development debate. They see the success of the organisation in assisting with the realisation of the Helsinki Communiqué (see the case study in Chapter 7) as a measure of what it can expect to achieve in this role. There is a preference here for a *higher value added* input overall – commissioning and compiling research on VET and VET systems in particular; offering specialist advice to the Commission and to Member States and helping to develop tools and products that can be put to use to achieve the objectives of the European VET strategy. On reporting, collecting, and analysing VET information at EU level, the ambition is seen as being less to construct data in-house but rather to support the development of appropriate statistics by other institutions such as Eurostat and the OECD along with a role to elaborate and add

value on data produced by others. The Directorate also felt that it can now make those "negative choices" referred to in the PLS Ramboll study – citing as an example the decision to decline a role in implementing the Knowledge System for Lifelong Learning since it was perceived to take up too many valuable resources with no clear benefits for Cedefop's stakeholders³³. As we shall see in Chapter Six, the Directorate now operates on the basis that its key stakeholders are the *effective VET decision makers* at national and European level and has restructured the organisational areas of the organisation to address the needs that they collectively identify as the critical ones. There was some willingness here to consider the idea of a 'think tank' that would provide "high level, visionary input". The line was, however, that it would need to operate on an informal basis producing think papers and that "the moment it was formalised it would change its nature".

Governing Board

As might be anticipated, the views of those members of the Governing Board we interviewed were much more varied in ways that reflect the normal "push and pull" of a quadripartite body. Overall, the interviews with representatives from the Governing Board confirmed the stronger alignment of Cedefop activity to European Commission requirements in recent years. What differed were some of the reactions to it. For example, there were some voices calling for greater independence (particularly from the European Commission) for Cedefop as a body. Indeed, there was a view from one interviewee that this greater independence might go as far as seeing Cedefop positioned as an independent "think tank" for VET at large (or perhaps even for lifelong learning).

Another important example of different perspectives that some respondents felt needed to shape debates in the Governing Board is the issue of how Cedefop is positioned in relation to the Member States – especially in a post-Lisbon environment where the state role in achieving EU level policy outcomes is much enhanced. There were some differential views from Board members on the issue of the role of the Member States in the development and implementation of European VET policy. As an example, the more extreme – but interesting - position of one respondent was as follows; *"I do not view Cedefop as a strategic player in VET policy-making because of the fact that VET policies are mainly developed at national level"*. Looking at the same issue from another direction we were told by another respondent that *"Cedefop has played a role in improved awareness, knowledge and understanding of EU policy priorities among organisations and policy makers throughout the EU – but only those policy-makers that deal with EU level*

³³Cedefop nevertheless supported the development of the tool and gave it over to the Commission once ready for implementation.

matters. Very few people at national level are aware of Cedefop and its work". To balance this up we can offer much stronger feedback that the newer Member States find Cedefop particularly helpful in helping to "speed up their VET development". One reason for picking out these comments is because they have a particular value in raising a subject that we shall be returning to later through the lens of the ReferNet case study, but there is a general need in the report to keep in mind the Member State dimension.

Looking back over these comments, the question for strategy might be this; if the ambition is to *add value to the development and implementation of EU VET overall* - where, in balancing the interests of the stakeholders who drive Cedefop, is the highest **value added** likely to come from? One view is that it is by working at the highest level through the Commission. Another view that some members of the Board were putting on the agenda is by working more closely with the Member States as they seek to line their policies up behind the Copenhagen process. Board members who spoke for the employers' organisations and the employee representatives were happy to accept that Member State interests were, in the post-Copenhagen context, very closely aligned with the position of the European Commission. They were also supportive of Cedefop being in a position to have a powerful influence on this process. However, as organisations representing broad and complex constituencies there was a call for much more attention to be given to some "more formal approach" to involve the wider community of stakeholders more closely in helping to design Cedefop's products and services. There was a concern that social partner needs are less well met and that the work of Cedefop may not adequately be reaching individual companies and professionals.

5.2.3 External perspectives on strategic choice

What we now want to introduce is how those outside Cedefop have seen its evolution over the study period, how it has responded to a changing environment and where it now sits in relation to the mandate it is still required to carry out. To help us here we have a series of interviews undertaken at the early stages of the project with European Commission officials, and a further set of interview with a small number of Directors General of VET conducted at the very end of the research. We begin with voices from the Commission.

European Commission officials

Stakeholder feedback from the interviews confirmed to us, once again, that in their view a strategic re-positioning had indeed taken place and that the need to meet a more focused agenda - in particular with regard to the Copenhagen process – had become stronger in the overall Cedefop mission. Since 2002, it was confirmed that the construction of a wider EU policy framework on VET (with assistance directly and indirectly from Cedefop) has

made it much easier by providing a more coherent and concrete framework for Cedefop to work with. In response, the view was that Cedefop activities have gradually become more focussed on supporting the common EU VET policy priorities as agreed by all EU member states whilst, at the same time, Cedefop has been able to strike the right balance between responding to the bottom-up demands of stakeholders and top-down policy requests from the EC. However, some of our Commission respondents accepted that this had resulted in a shift in the balance of Cedefop in relation to its stakeholders – with a much stronger influence exerted by the European Commission partner in general and DGEAC in particular.

Directors General of VET (DGVT)

The limited consultation with the DGVTs seemed to show that the relationship between DGVTs and the senior management of Cedefop is a positive one. The suggestion was that; *"in the past Cedefop has tended to set its own priorities. We welcome current actions by Cedefop to identify priorities via stakeholder engagement and consultation, and this should result in better 'buy-in' to their activities"*. There is a clear recognition of the contribution that Cedefop has made to pan-European VET policy and practice (particularly to the 2010 Education and Training Programme) and there is support for the way the new management is re-focusing its activities. There is, they suggest, an important pan-European role to be filled in providing a focus on VET beyond the national remit. There was also favourable comment on Cedefop as an 'at distance' intermediary between national VET systems and the European Commission a 'distance' that "encourages national bodies to engage more readily".

Much of the value was seen to be coming from the way Member States can draw on VET data and analytical skills from Cedefop. But, of course, the concern expressed was the resource and staff limitations of trying to serve 27 nations and the impact of this on what could practically be expected by any individual DGVT. The flip-side of this in the view of respondents is the requirement for Cedefop itself to know more about the different national systems, to participate more in activities at national levels and to strengthen professional and personal contacts. Once again we return to the "wicked issue" for Cedefop of doing some things to the exclusion of others in a situation of virtually fixed funding.

5.3 Achieving the right balance of objectives; judging opportunity costs

5.3.1 A process of re-alignment

What we have seen then is that the strategic positioning of Cedefop raised issues that are specific to the highly regulated form of the organisation and to the limited menu of possibilities that this offers in trying to confront a changed external environment. What Cedefop is now taking on board is the engineering of a trade-off that involves being less "open to all" - as it was predominantly up to 2005 - and now needs to "read" how best to act to meet the policy requirements of the entire EU VET system. In terms of governance, it depends formally on interpreting through the eyes of its established stakeholders on its Board. What we can clearly confirm about this is as follows; that in the eyes of all the key players there has been a measurable transformation in the ethos and strategy; that this started in the early years after 2002 and accelerated sharply since 2005; and that the primary impact that Cedefop now wants to make is a more central and strategic one in relation to the development of European VET policy in general. We can also confirm that Cedefop has come to play a more active agenda setting and intellectual leadership role in helping to raise the profile of VET overall and helping Member States (within limits) to align themselves with an increasingly coherent and integrated Copenhagen Agenda.

5.3.2 Challenges to confront

There are, of course, costs as well as benefits to come from this re-alignment (a more apt description than re-positioning in our view as we have worked through the material) and as we have suggested already managing such a change is non-trivial in an organisation so tightly bound by its regulatory processes. In terms of the balance of choices we would suggest that it is still too early to see the wider community of users reacting to the realignment³⁴. Cedefop's key stakeholders in the Governing Board appear aware of and largely support this strategic re-alignment (with quite naturally some suggestions for alternative weights given to elements of the strategy). There are, however, some challenges yet to confront. We will deal with only some of them here since we need to look inside the organisation and the way its objectives are endowed with resources (Chapter Six) before we can make a full appraisal.

This is perhaps the right place to be making the point that easing the path to realignment can be achieved better by communicating the essence of the adjusted mission and its rationale to the outside world. We have found that many users/customers of Cedefop

³⁴ This, we believe, underlies the contrasting stories told by Chapter 4 and 5.

among the wider user community have only the most limited understanding of what is happening. As a simple illustration, the Web home page provides the mission statement “Cedefop is the European Agency to promote the development of vocational education and training (VET) in the European Union”. When the ‘more’ hyperlink is clicked on the home page, the next screen of information states “Cedefop is the centre of expertise to support the development of VET and evidence-based policy-making. It provides advice, research, analysis, information, and stimulates European cooperation and mutual learning”. This is, of course, exactly as it should be – except that any reader at any level might be disappointed to learn that the "open access" that it seems to promise might not at this juncture be quite what it seems. Cedefop has already recognised the need "to achieve targeted communication with policy makers, stakeholders and the wider public, following on from a recommendation of the European Parliament to EU agencies in 2007³⁵". Perhaps a new target would be to engage the wider community in the debate that has arisen in this Chapter.

On a second level there is an even stronger case to be made for being more active in taking the staff of the organisation across the board along with the realignment process. We have reason to believe from the staff focus group and interviews that this is something that would benefit from early attention. The staff seemed to be in need of support in being brought along with the vision of the Directorate and Board to give them a sense of purpose and increased confidence.

The strategic choices we have just described take on their operational reality through the process of allocating available resources to alternative uses. This comes by attaching funding streams to areas of activity and to individual activities. We look at this in close detail in the next Chapter.

³⁵ as stated in the Director's note to the Governing Board regarding the reorganisation of the Areas

6.0 Operational Activities: Allocating Resources and Monitoring Outcomes

6.1 Operational Activities in Support of Objectives

In previous chapters we have seen the broad shape of the objectives and strategy for Cedefop and how this is perceived by the wider community of users and the key stakeholders. We now turn our attention to an examination of how those objectives were converted into operational activities, how they were resourced and how the expenditure was accounted for in the sense that outputs were monitored. Among the key questions we need to ask in this chapter are the following: what evidence is there that the resources were appropriately allocated to the objectives?; what does this allocation tell us about the realignment of strategy ?; and how well managed was the resources allocation and output measurement function? To capture the information needed to answer these questions we have been largely dependent on information made available by Cedefop itself for the 6 year period that the evaluation is required to cover.

What we are looking at here is essentially the operations of the organisation as it attempts to convert its objectives and strategies into outcomes. We can say something here about effectiveness, but for real estimation of the way Cedefop captured results from its operations we will need to return to the issue in Chapter 7 through what are essentially proxy measures. Before we can begin, however, we need to set out some of the limitations we have had to confront in carrying out this aspect of the study.

The key evaluation questions for this section of the report:

Efficiency: How cost effectively were Cedefop's resources (inputs) turned into outputs or results?

Effectiveness: How far has Cedefop allocated its resources to improve its usefulness to its users?

6.2 Critical Issues of Data Availability and Consistency

Our brief required us to conduct an evaluation of Cedefop spanning the six years 2001-2006 a period during which, as we set out in the previous chapter, there has been considerable internal and external change. One of the most challenging aspects of any longitudinal evaluation is to find a way to capture information that remains consistent year on year. This is especially difficult for institutional evaluations where data on actions is not designed for long-run consistency but is the "after the fact" product of operational decisions that change data categories; that respond to internal changes in management and that are often a reflection of how management at different points sees the importance of accounting, measurement and monitoring as part of normal activity. We believe, however, that it will be in the interests of Cedefop - for its own purposes - vastly to improve the way it monitors and evaluates its own activities as a key component of management information and strategy development.

We have seen examples of all the issues just discussed in our attempts to assemble a consistent data series for Cedefop over the 6 year period. Our aim has been to find some common ground that; a) links to the intervention logic and; b) has some internal coherence and longitudinal consistency. Wherever possible, we have tried to group Cedefop's activities and the resources applied to them under the five operational objectives and to do this we have had to look through the lens of Cedefop's own allocation of activities by (Operational) Areas. In practice this has, of course, involved some "creative" adjustment since that typology itself changed over the six years. In addition, some activities were either difficult to assign to one Area or moved from one to another. For our purposes, we have used the figures provided by Cedefop under its operational Areas as proxies for the operational objectives. This sort of issue has already been acknowledged by Cedefop itself and this is reflected in the new organisational structure of Areas introduced in mid-2007³⁶.

From the point of view of issues like efficiency and value for money we found ourselves even more at a disadvantage in reviewing the six year profile. To examine this, what we needed was data on efficiency (actual spend per unit output) per activity. We understand

³⁶ Five areas were initially established in 2002: Area A: developing research, Area B: reporting and facilitating a concerted approach, Area C: exchange and supporting partners, Area D: information, communication and dissemination, and Area E: administration, facilities and resources. A further internal reform in 2006 saw Cedefop's administrative services re-organised (mainly in the area of resources (procurement, finance) on the one hand and information and communication on the other). In the summer of 2007, this was followed by a further comprehensive reorganisation of the operational areas. Four new divisions of activity are now recognised. Research and Policy Analysis; Enhanced Cooperation in VET and LLL; Communication, Information and Dissemination; and Resources.

that Cedefop first assigned FTEs to individual projects in the Work Programme for 2007. Moreover, Cedefop designed the Activity Based Budgeting 2008 which will be monitored throughout 2008 and will constitute the basis for reporting in 2008. But for the years covered by this study (2001-2006) we were faced with very little useable information concerning *overall* actual spend by activity. FTEs were assigned to activities within each Area and although each staff member had a set of assigned goals/tasks, there was no system in place to record *actual* labour input by activity.

With respect to output monitoring we have found ourselves in the same situation. The systematic monitoring of results and impacts only started to gain recognition in 2001 with the 2001 Annual Report first referring to the "achievement of outputs". The 2003-2005 Annual Reports note the achievement of certain measured outputs, and include an annex with "visibility performance indicators" (looking mainly at the usage of Cedefop websites, publications and translations lists). The 2005 Annual Report refers to "performance indicators" for the first time (with a section on performance for some of the activities). Since 2005 and 2006 are the only two years with comparable classifications of activities and with increased detail on outputs and performance indicators, we have been able to say more about how money was assigned to tasks for the last two years of the evaluation period. Even here, however, data on outputs are also difficult to compare across the two years since the 2005 report is very detailed (e.g. providing detailed information on key initiatives and meetings), whilst the 2006 report presents a more aggregated view of outputs by area of activity.

We are aware that others (Court of Auditors and the Internal Audit Service, for example) have been looking at these sorts of issues in Cedefop from their particular perspectives and we have no ambition to enter into this. We can also report that many of these issues are now being taken on board by the current management team and with the appointment of an internal auditor from 2006 onwards. However, beyond activity based *budgeting* which Cedefop aims to introduce in 2008, it is activity based *reporting* that would give a robust basis for future internal and external evaluations. We turn in the next section to some of the broad financial data for Cedefop.

6.3 Resources applied over the evaluation period

6.3.1 General level of resources

We would distinguish three periods in the timeframe covered by the study as far as financial data are concerned: the period 2000-2003 for which there is a common nomenclature but where individuals' memories to recover judgements about what was done are stretched; the financial year 2004 where financial accounts are particularly difficult to use due to serious gaps in the information; and the period 2005-2006 where budget nomenclature offers us a two year comparison with comparable data. We have also been dogged in attempting to capture even the most basic year-on-year income estimates from EU sources by a rolling revaluation of the allocation of funds from the budget line as reported in the Official Journal. Later years' estimates have seen sometimes significant readjustment retrospectively of earlier financial data³⁷. For this reason, we find ourselves in difficulty even in reporting simple information on gross income and expenditure for the agency. In what follows we report what we have assembled, but we are very much aware of its deficiencies in supporting a cogent evaluation storyline.

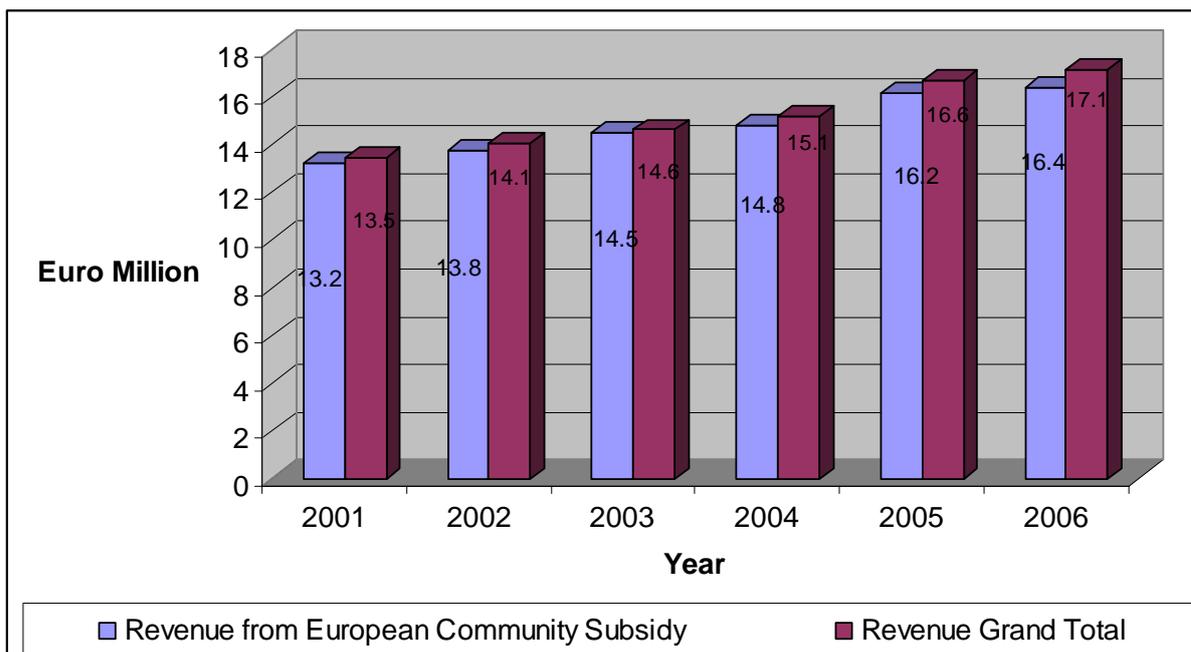
6.3.2 Revenue and expenditure

We begin with Figure 6.1 which shows an estimate of the general level of resources allocated to Cedefop yearly from 2001 to 2006. Because of the difficulty in assembling a consistent data series the data presented are for broad illustration only. It appears that there has been an average growth of revenue for Cedefop of around 4-5 percent per annum with a 30 percent growth in nominal funding over the study period. We have made no attempt at inflation weighting the data for an organisation based in Greece but it seems reasonable to take the view that – at best – Cedefop has had "flat-line" funding with virtually no growth in real terms³⁸. Clearly the bulk of the funding comes from the European subsidy, but there are also external incomes sources from Norway and Iceland as well as some directly earned revenue, particularly in the later years.

³⁷ As an example of the difficulty we have faced in producing a simple timeline graph of income we find in two successive financial reports in the Official Journal (L96/156 and L67/174) quite different statements of the EU subsidy to Cedefop for the financial year 2004. In the report published in 2005 it was 15.8 millions while in the 2006 report it was 13.7 millions. To cope with this we have resorted to averages of varying estimates.

³⁸ This has importance for the discussion in Chapter 5 about the opportunity costs issue where choices to do one thing or another have much greater difficulty under conditions of resources constraints.

Figure 6.1 Estimated Revenue for Cedefop 2001-2006



Source: Statement of revenue and expenditure of the European Centre for the Development of Vocational Training (Cedefop) for the financial year 2001, 2002, 2003, 2004, 2005, 2006; Official Journal of the European Union

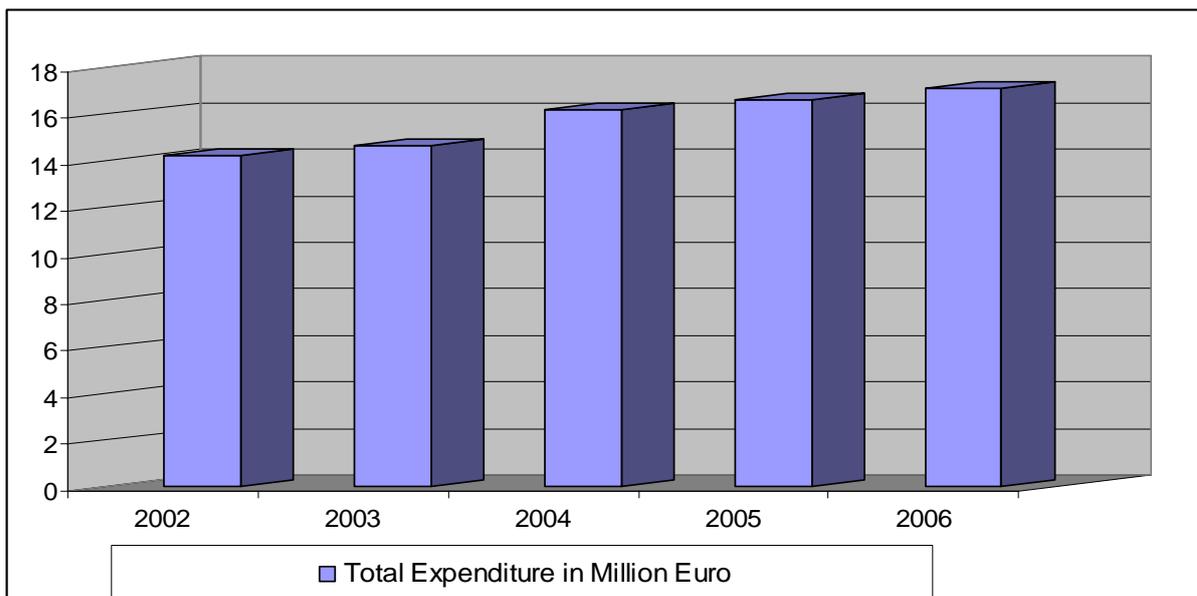
Notes:

1) The 2004 figures are an average of the three different figures quoted for the EC Subsidy Revenue and Total Revenue for the Financial Year 2004, published in the OJ for FY 2004, OJ for FY 2005 and OJ for FY 2006

2) The 2005 figures are averages of the two different figures quoted for EC Subsidy Revenue and Total Revenue for the Financial Year 2005, published in the OJ for FY 2005 and OJ for FY 2006

From the perspective of expenditure (where data seem more consistent by year), Figure 6.2 shows the pattern of spend rising generally along with income. The step jump 2003-2004 coincides with enlargement and with increased payments from third parties (Iceland, Norway and other payments for the Commission – PHARE). It would be interesting for us to bring income and expenditure together but we believe that the vagaries of the data for these two years are such that this would lead to misleading conclusions.

Figure 6.2 Total Cedefop expenditure 2002-2006



Source: *Statements of revenue and expenditure of the European Centre for the Development of Vocational Training (Cedefop) for the financial years 2002, 2003, 2004, 2005, 2006; Official Journal of the European Union*

6.3.3 Budget absorption

Under the financial Regulation that governs EU expenditures the issue of absorption can be a critical variable for an agency like Cedefop. This is the ability, within a given system of eligibilities and timeframe, for a programme, project or agency to draw down, commit and spend funds from the available EU budget line. Table 6.1, assembled from Cedefop Annual Reports, shows that this has been an issue for the organisation particularly in 2005 and 2006 and has significantly influenced the funding actually available for its activities in those years. For example, Cedefop was unable fully to absorb the available budget in 2005 (overall execution of budget 91.4%) and 2006 (overall execution of budget 92%).

Table 6.1 Overall Budget absorption

Year	Available (Budget)	Committed	Execution % of Budget	"Execution" of EU Funds
2001*				
2002	€ 14,450,000	€ 13,720,000	99%	€ 14,305,500
2003*				
2004**	€ 15,872,000	€ 15,602,265	98%	€ 15,554,600
2005	€ 16,418,000	€ 15,006,836	91%	€ 14,940,400
2006	€ 16,840,000	€ 15,485,572	92%	€ 15,492,800

Source: Cedefop annual reports 2001-2006

Note: * No comparative figures available

**Provisional overall budget execution

It is important to set this in its proper context since, although it resulted in a loss of resource, it resulted from positive management action by the incoming Director to bring financial management under closer control for the future. In particular, the new Director reinforced internal control standards and reorganised procurement services in the last quarter of 2005. The following extracts from Cedefop's Annual Accounts for the Financial Years 2005 and 2006 provide the detail:

"The under-commitments in Titles 2 and 3 reflect the measures taken by the management of the Centre to tighten up internal control of procurement procedures in the last quarter of 2005. Because procurement procedures are lengthy, it was not possible to complete the alternative procedures in 2005." (Annual Accounts 2005)

"Underspending [in 2006] concerned mostly Title 1 (staff) due to the establishment plan not being fully filled for various reasons: staff turnover, lengthy and partly unfruitful recruitment procedures, reservation of posts for middle management recruitments in 2007; at the end of 2006, 9 recruitment procedures were ongoing and 2 were in preparation. In 2006, budget implementation for Titles 2 and 3 was up to target, despite a much tighter internal control environment and the implementation of stricter procurement rules than those foreseen by the financial regulation".³⁹ (Annual Accounts 2006)

While it is not our task to go into the detail of these circumstances, it is important to our purpose to make the point that issues of internal management and budgetary control have had an impact on the real resources that Cedefop has been applying to the objectives it

³⁹ Cedefop informed us that by the end of 2007, all posts on the establishment plan were filled with the exception of one, where the post is reserved for one person currently in secondment.

has set for itself – especially where overall funding appears to have been broadly static in real terms.

6.3.4 Allocation of funds to objectives and areas

The table below (6.2) marks an attempt to answer the question "how was the resource allocated to operational objectives year on year?" We have had to construct it from an assembly of information of different kinds and for those headings which we can conveniently use. These needed to map onto the operational objectives as far as possible and be consistent over a run of time. Once again, a table such as this has to be taken as *indicative* rather than definitive. We use it here as a guide, from within the resources data, to point out some of the issues that will be developed in later chapters when we try to "drill down" into the detail of operational activities to assess effectiveness and impact.

Table 6.2 Estimates of broad budget allocations across objectives

Indicator	2002	2003	2004	2005	2006	2007***
**Operational Objective 'Carry out research'; (assembled from data for Area A)						New Area Research and Policy Analysis
Cedefop staff by area	*	10 FTE	11.6 FTE	12 FTE	12 FTE	27 FTE
Operational Budget for the Area (forecast)	€ 942,000	€1,005,000	€ 981,000	€1,038,000	€ 1,143,000	
Operational Objectives 'Report, collect, analyse VET information ' and 'Provide technical advice and support' (assembled from data for Area B)						
Cedefop staff by area	*	18 FTE	21.9 FTE	19 FTE	18 FTE	
Operational Budget for the Area (forecast)	€ 1,784,000	€1,659,000	€1,470,000	€1,575,000	€1,460,000	
Operational Objective for 'Promote cooperation' (assembled from data for Area C)						New Area Enhanced Cooperation in VET & LLL
Cedefop staff by area	*	11 FTE	12.5 FTE	12 FTE	14 FTE	26 FTE
Operational Budget for the Area (forecast)	€ 1,681,000	€1,224,000	€1,303,000	€1,435,000	€1,425,000	

Indicator	2002	2003	2004	2005	2006	2007***
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Operational Objective 'Disseminate VET Info and Data' (assembled from information for Area D)						New Area Communication, Information and Dissemination
Cedefop staff by area	*	41 FTE	37.2 FTE	40 FTE	36 FTE	33 FTE
Operational Budget for the Area (forecast)	€ 1,605,000	€1,529,000	€1,550,000	€1,450,000	€1,440,000	
Directorate, administrative and technical services						New Area Resources
Cedefop staff by area	*	40 FTE	40.5 FTE	38 FTE	43 FTE	Directorate: 7 FTE Resources: 42 FTE
Operational Budget for the Area (forecast)	€ 317,000	€ 279,000	€ 165,000	€ 100,000	€ 110,000	

Source: Annual reports Cedefop 2002, 2003, 2004, 2005, 2006

Note *: The number of FTE posts not indicated for the year 2002, only an end of year list of staff is provided

Note **: Activities may have shifted from year to year between areas and this has not been dealt with.

Note ***: FTE data for the restructured Areas in 2007, provided by Cedefop on 23/11/07

The assignment of staff resource

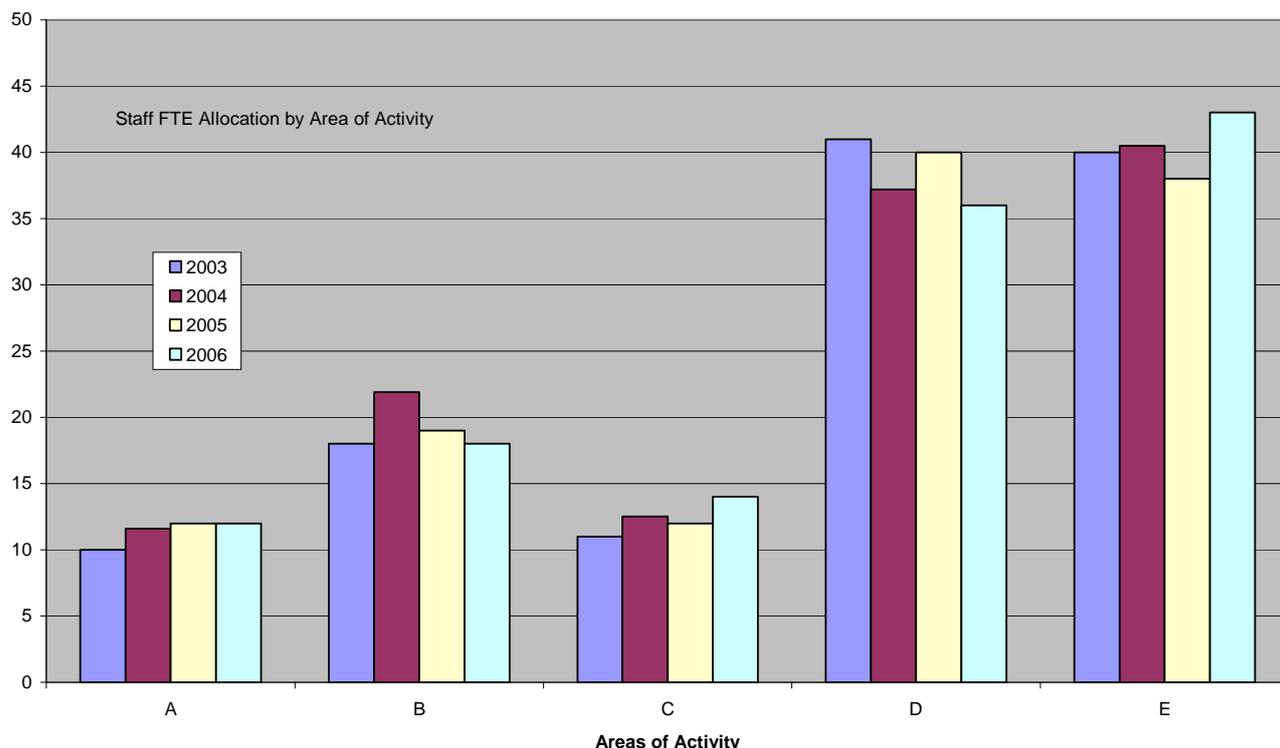
What we can see from Figure 6.3 – drawn from one component of Table 6.2 – is first of all that the bulk of the employment in Cedefop over the period 2003 to 2006 has been confined to two areas. One services the activities assigned to the objective for the *dissemination of VET information and data* (Area D) while the other is, not unexpectedly, for *director, administrative and technical services* (Area E). Between them they have consistently accounted for around two-thirds of the total complement of the organisation. What is also interesting is that this share has been remarkably stable despite the ups and downs we have been talking about in Chapter 5. Where there has been a slow decline from 33 to 29 percent for the *information* area this has been balanced by a rise from 33 to 35 percent in the *administrative* area.

If we add the activities for *reporting, collecting and analysing VET information* along with that for *technical advice and support* (B) to that for *dissemination* the core activity of Cedefop stands out plainly as that *open source reference centre function* we spoke so much about in Chapters 4 and 5. Together, this cluster of activities serving the three reference centre objectives accounts for around 70 percent of the staff allocated to tasks outside the administration of the organisation. There has been a gradual fall in this – reflecting marginally shifting priorities – but the weight of the reference centre function in the operations of Cedefop up to 2006 is plain to see.

What is also of some interest was the continuing small share of the staff resource allocation that goes to *carrying out research into VET systems and issues* over the evaluation period. Only a stable 9-10 percent of all FTEs is assigned here over the study period and, if the administrative staff count is removed, the percentage of the "activity-assigned" staff for *research* still represents only 14-15 percent of the total. It has to be remembered that what we are seeing here is both a frame of reference (the way the categories are assigned) and a period of time when that strategic realignment we referred to in chapter 5 had not yet had time to follow through into activity patterns⁴⁰.

⁴⁰ We have been informed by Cedefop that steps have already been taken to address this situation. Following the 2007 reorganisation of the Areas on the one hand and recent recruitments on the other hand, the new Area Research and Policy Analysis had 27 FTE staff on 1 November 2007, clearly strengthening staff resources in this area.

Figure 6.3 Staff FTE allocation by area of activity

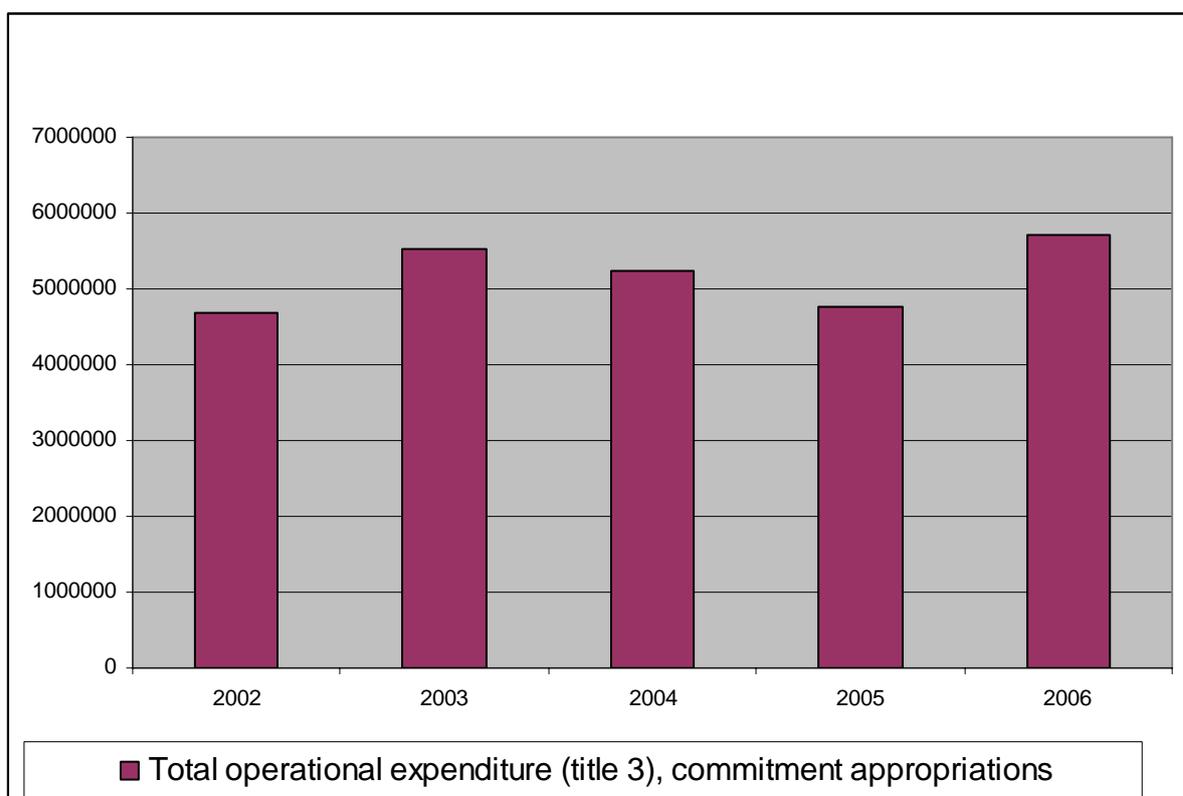


Source: Annual Reports of Cedefop 2002, 2003, 2004, 2005, 2006 (as summarised in Table 6.2)

The assignment of operational (non-staff) spend

We can take an indicative look at non-staff operational funding allocations – this time for a longer period 2002-2006 (Figure 6.4) based on data provided in the Cedefop annual accounts on total operational expenditure for these years. First, we can see the broad trend of overall resource allocation. This reveals that, from 2003 onwards, there is relative stability at around 5.5 millions for operational expenditure, with the exception of the year 2005 where, as already mentioned, there was low budget absorption for Title 3 expenditure.

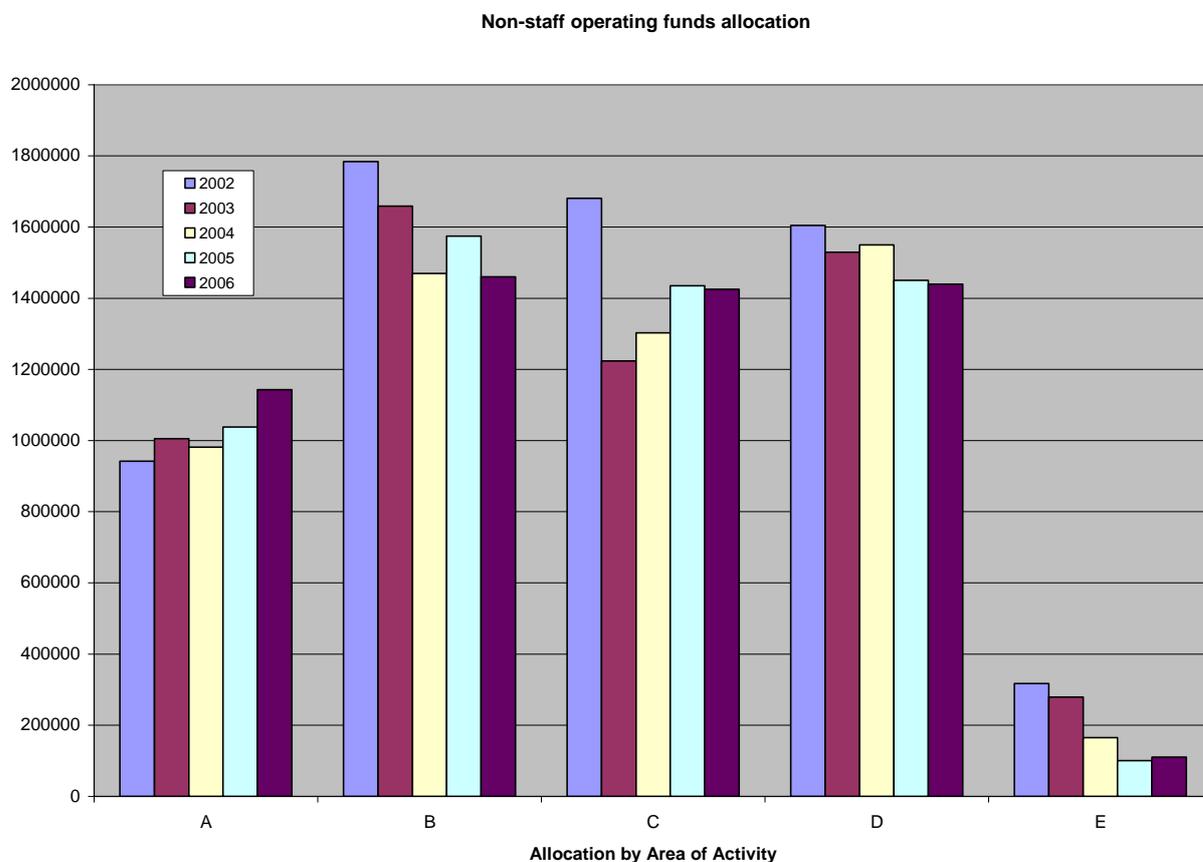
Figure 6.4 Total operational (non-staff) expenditure



Source: Cedefop Annual Accounts 2002-2006

If we turn our attention to the way the non-staff operational expenditure is allocated to Operational Areas (see figure 6.5, which is using the details of table 6.2 presented earlier), a number of interesting features emerge. In the case of those activities servicing the operational objective of *carrying out research* for example, there is a steady year on year rise – but not, as we have just seen, one necessarily matched by the allocation of staff time. The other activity to see a rising trend is that for *promoting cooperation*. This again fits in well with the story that a move toward tools and services - acting in many cases as "network products" - has been taking place over the review period. There is also a more noticeable decline in the *dissemination of information and data* objective. One would not want to make too much of this, but the sorts of trends that we have been revealing elsewhere in the report seem to be better confirmed here than in the case of the allocation of staff resource (where there is no system to record staff time actually spent against each activity).

Figure 6.5 Non-staff operating costs funds allocation



Source: Annual Reports of Cedefop 2002, 2003, 2004, 2005, 2006 (as summarised in Table 6.2)

6.3.5 From inputs to outputs: some indication of activities performed by operational Area

Up to this point we have been able to look at the broad shape of the spending profile of Cedefop allocated across those operational objectives we set out earlier in the intervention logic. We have been able to see something of the "balance of effort" in the organisation as it strives to meet its mandate and deliver its objectives. What we would have ideally wanted to do at this point is to switch our attention to outputs and results in order to see what Cedefop was buying for its and its sponsors' money. This has not been possible for the reasons set out already. We do, however, need to find a way to measure - mostly by proxy - those outputs that Cedefop has achieved over the review period. We propose to do this in two ways. In the next section we have drawn together material for those two years where we are most comfortable with the comparative information – 2005 and 2006 and where we can make simple counts of deliverables. This material is then drawn out in

more detail in the next chapter of the report where we focus on some of the key areas of the Cedefop strategy.

Table 6.3 below offers an overview of the initiatives supported by each of Cedefop's (operational) Areas for the years 2005 and 2006. This table has been assembled from Cedefop's annual reports 2005 and 2006. We note that in 2006, Cedefop changed the style of reporting its outputs in order to offer a more rational grouping of activities, and this is reflected in the description of 2006 outputs in a summarised style. This can give the misleading visual impression that less was done but this is not the case. We do not propose to explore the detail here since this will be done in subsequent chapters but we are in a position to make some general observations.

First, activity clearly covers an enormous terrain and is vast in both volume and breadth of types of activity and VET themes covered. The table shows how broad the 'customer' base is that Cedefop sets itself to serve. Second, over the period 2005-2006 Cedefop has clearly been trying to address the dual task of continuing 'normal service' on the one hand whilst bringing together sets of activities around the Copenhagen process and its priorities on the other. Third and closely related to the last point, Cedefop clearly faces a balancing act between its longer-term on-going activities and commitments and shorter, project-based, time-limited activity. There is also some evidence from the table of increasing flexibility in how it operates. Finally, in Areas A and B, activities linked to EU level policy and which are a response/support to Commission activity are especially prominent.

Table 6.3 Overview of key initiatives and events supported by Cedefop in 2005 and 2006

Output indicators				
Indicator	2005	2006	Comments 2005	Comments 2006
Area A: Developing research				
Number of key initiatives mentioned in the annual reports	9	7	1) European Research Overview, 2) Cedefop's research arena, 3) Skillsnet, 4) Research on the history of VET, 5) 3rd Research Report, 6) Coordinating review of Maastricht priorities, 7) 4th Research Report, 8) European Journal Vocational Training, 9) AGORA	1) Preparation for Helsinki Ministerial Conference, 2) Dissemination of 3rd Research Report, 3) Preparation of 4th Research Report, 4) Cedefop's research arena, 5) Coordinating follow-up / review of Maastricht priorities, 6) Skillsnet, 7) EJVT Journal
Number of events	12	3	1) Chair EU conference on education research,	1) Contribution to Helsinki Ministerial Conference,

Output indicators			
(organised by Cedefop or with important Cedefop input)			<p>2) Seminar on EU VET research agenda, 3) Event on European research networks, 4-5) 2 Skillsnet workshops, 6) Research seminar on types of national VET systems / role of VET, 7) Updated exhibition on VET history, 8) Brainstorming session for 4th Research Report, 9) Launch conference for 4th Research Report), 10-12) 3 AGORA Conferences</p> <p>2) Conference for the 4th Research Report, 3) AGORA Conference on older workers</p>
Area B: Reporting and facilitating a concerted approach			
Number of key initiatives mentioned in the annual reports	9	6	<p>1) eKnowVet, 2) review of major current VET developments for the DGVT meeting, 3) Joint Education and Training 2010 report, 4) Evaluating the implementation of the Maastricht priorities and their review, 5) KSLLL, 6) expert support on the euro barometer survey 'Lifelong learning', 7) technical and scientific support to the Commission groups & clusters, networks, adhoc and standing groups for implementing the Education and Training 2010 agenda, 8) Europass, 9) Short descriptions of national VET systems</p> <p>1) Joint Education and Training 2010 report, 2) technical and scientific support to the Commission groups & clusters, networks, adhoc and standing groups for implementing the Education and Training 2010 agenda, 3) Europass, 4) eKnowVet, 5) Short descriptions of national VET systems, 6) review of major current VET developments for the DGVT meeting</p>
Number of events (organised by Cedefop or with important Cedefop input)	47	2	<p>1) workshop on progress with ReferNet members (eKnowVet) 2- 3) Contributions to 2 DGVET meetings, 4) CEN/ISSS workshop on ICT skills, 5) contribution to the DGEAC and DGJoint Research Centre/Institute for Prospective Technological Studies (IPTS) workshop on the future of ICT / learning in the knowledge society in 2020, 6-7) 2 validation seminars on the Helios project</p> <p>1) TTNNet workshop, 2) conference on e-skills</p>

Output indicators			
			<p>8-10) contribution to the European discussion on e-learning in major conferences and European forums (Commission e-learning conference, EDEN Conference, Educa Online, 11-12) Two KSLLL meetings, 13-16) 3 TNet meetings & TNet annual conference, 17-37) 20 expert group meetings (concerted approach to VET open area), 38-39) 2 meetings on guidance, 40) conference on common European reference guidance tools, 41) peer learning meeting on guidance indicators, 42-47) conference on quality in VET & 2 peer learning visits & 2 steering group meetings on quality assurance in VET/HE & one further meeting</p>
Area C: Exchange and supporting partners			
Number of key initiatives mentioned in the annual reports	3	3	<p>1) Leonadro da Vinci Study Visits programme, 2) familiarisation of candidate countries, 3) support to social partners and development of sectoral approach</p>
Number of events (organised by Cedefop or with important Cedefop input)	14	4	<p>1) Preparatory seminar for study visit organisers, 2) Annual meeting of NLOs and TSAs, 3) conference for the 20th anniversary of study visits, 4-5) 2 training seminars for NLOs of study visits on VET in the agri-food sector & banking and finance sector, 6-8) 3 familiarisation seminars for Cedefop staff on the NMS, 9-10) 2 ETF-Cedefop seminars, 11) workshop on LLL statistics, 12) information session for Bulgarian delegation, 13-14) 2 sectoral approach meetings</p>
Area D: Information, communication and dissemination (including Public Relations)			
Number of key	5	5	<p>1) Management of ReferNet,</p>

Output indicators				
initiatives mentioned in the annual reports			2) Management of Publications, 3) VET-Bib, 4) Reference / query service, 5) Management of ETV	2) Management of Publications, 3) VET-Bib, 4) Reference / query service, 5) Management of ETV
Number of events	18	?	1-16) 16 Cedefop promotion events, 17-18) 2 ReferNet meetings	
Directorate, Area E: administrative and technical services				
Number of management meetings	7	7	1 Governing Board meeting and 6 Bureau meetings	1 Governing Board meeting and 6 Bureau meetings

Source: Cedefop annual reports 2005 and 2006

Broad elements of expenditure

Now that we have looked at the pattern of spend across the activities and operating areas of Cedefop, it will be of value as a final step to see how this fits in to the broad pattern of overall spend for the organisation. To introduce this, we offer Table 6.4. This shows for the latest year we have available (2006) the broad categories of overall spend for Cedefop. This shows that in 2006 some 57 percent of the total expenditure went on staff, and around 8 percent on buildings and equipment, leaving a balance of almost 6 millions in the operating expenditure category we have just been exploring.

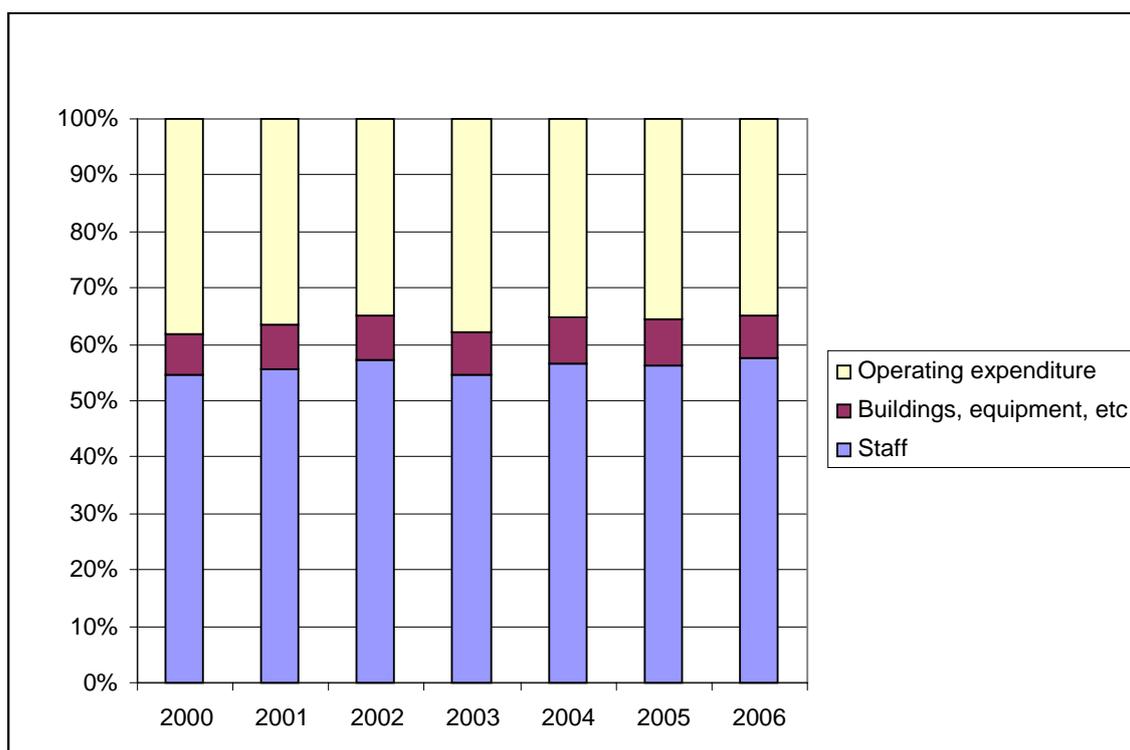
Table 6.4 Total Expenditure by Broad Category, 2006

Expenditure, 2006 (Commitments)	€	%
Staff	9 832 000	57.4
Buildings, equipment, etc	1 330 000	7.8
Gross Overheads	11 162 000	
Operating expenditure	5 954 360	34.8
Grand total	17 116 360	100.00

Source: Statements of revenue and expenditure of the European Centre for the Development of Vocational Training (Cedefop) for the financial year 2006; Official Journal of the European Union

What is interesting to this study is, yet again, how stable this pattern has been over the 6 year period (Figure 6.6). Once more, it is possible perhaps to see the rule-bound nature of the funding regime sitting behind the physical form of the organisation. All three categories of spend – staff, buildings etc and operating costs - vary by no more than a few percentage points relative to each other over the entire period.

Figure 6.6 Total Expenditure by Broad Category, 2000-2006



Source: Statements of revenue and expenditure of the European Centre for the Development of Vocational Training (Cedefop) for the financial years 2002, 2003, 2004, 2005, 2006; Official Journal of the European Union

Staff profile of expenditure

Since such a large proportion of the expenditure for Cedefop relates to the staff category it will be of value briefly to look at this element of the organisation in more detail. Table 6.5 presents a view of the staff dimension over the period for the study. The first thing to note is that the number of staff has also been relatively stable. The average number for the period is 122 with a peak of 137 in 2004 settling back to 123 in 2006. We have been informed that 2004 was a peak year in terms of interim staff who worked mainly on the ETV and in administration. Cedefop's expenditure on staff was virtually flat over the later years of the study period - standing between 9.3 and 9.8 million Euros. The number of people employed over the period increased by 11%, and the total expenditure on staff increased by 14.7% in nominal terms. What this reveals is an organisation either tightly controlling - or being tightly controlled by - a staff budget that accounts for over half its available resources⁴¹.

⁴¹ Cedefop's multi-annual staff policy plan 2008-2010 states that Cedefop's Establishment Plan (i.e. the number of posts approved for Cedefop by the European Parliament every year) has gradually increased to cover increasing demand to

Table 6.5 Staff in active employment 2001-2005

Staff in active employment						
	Number of Operational Staff	Number of Administrative Staff	Number of 'Mixed' Staff	Total Staff	Expenditure on staff (total)	Average expenditure per person employed
2001				114	€ 7,497,113	€ 65,764
2002	59	33	19	111	€ 8,117,351	€ 73,129
2003	66	38	21	125	€ 7,996,927	€ 63,975
2004	74	40	23	137	€ 9,313,000	€ 67,978
2005	85	33	5	123	€ 9,310,000	€ 75,691
2006*				123	€ 9,832,000	€ 79,935
% change 2002-2005	44%	0.00	-74%	11%	15%	3.5%

*Source: Distinction between 'operational', 'administrative' and 'mixed' staff taken from the Reports of the Court of Auditors on the annual accounts of the European Centre for the Development of Vocational Training for the financial year 2001, 2002, 2003, 2004, 2005; Official Journal of the European Union Note: *Distinction between 'operational', 'administrative' and 'mixed' staff is not provided for 2006*

As Table 6.5 shows, the distribution of persons in employment by task (operational, administrative, and mixed) shifted over the period from 2002 to 2005, with an increase in operational staff whilst the numbers of administrative staff increased and then returned to its 2002 figure. By 2005 some 69 % of all staff were in the operational category compared to 53% in 2002..

6.4 Making Good Use of Resources to Deliver Objectives: Summary

What we have seen over the previous sections is a picture of a European Union Agency operating within a highly regulated framework of finance and resources allocation. The scenario that emerges is, above all, one of relative stand-still – almost stasis. Overall gross income (funds made available) has, in real rather than nominal terms, been at best unchanged over the six years. Overall expenditure – again in real terms – would naturally have been expected also to be fixed. But here we need to introduce the issue of absorption. Against largely fixed revenue there is evidence in the data that, particularly in

perform new and additional tasks linked to the Lisbon agenda, enhanced cooperation in VET and the Education and Training 2010 Work Programme, as well as following EU enlargement.

2005 and 2006, a failure to "execute" (due to the reasons described by Cedefop, above) the full budgetary amount received might well have resulted in a real loss of resource for the organisation to deliver its objectives. This was, of course, a challenging period for Cedefop in general management terms. Interestingly, however, there is no evidence to show that a noticeable fall in activity and output took place. Indeed, it has to be said that Cedefop continued as we saw in Table 6.4 to pour out a stream of activities across its broad portfolio in the years 2005 and 2006.

From a capacity perspective most of those we spoke to inside Cedefop seemed to agree that resources have been adequate for covering existing activities and the record shows that this has apparently been so. But what is equally clear is that there has been no financial room whatever to invest in new ventures or, and this is a point made forcefully to us across the organisation, to cope with the considerable new expectations that Cedefop has been called to meet. Enlargement was a challenge that, at a stroke, virtually doubled the geographical reach of the mandate that Cedefop was expected to fulfil. In terms of the balance of need for the sort of role that Cedefop sees itself as dedicated to perform, the pull of enlargement was far more than a doubling of effective demand. While we can point to a small funding "spike" in 2004-2005 there is absolutely no doubt that it was insufficient to sustain in the long run the span of Cedefop over 27 nations.

As we showed in Chapter 2 and again in Chapter 5, the entire European VET system has undergone a major transformation over the review period (not least with the help of Cedefop). This has necessitated, at the very least, a substantial realignment in the activities of the organisation (recognised here as an additional specific objective) to meet the demands of the new system. As with the demands of enlargement this too has had to be played out strategically within the rules of a zero sum game. Whatever was new had to be accommodated, in resource terms, by reductions elsewhere. We are now in a position, on the evidence of this chapter to confirm that, for Cedefop's evolving strategy, over the period 2001-2006 opportunity costs had to be a constant issue to be considered.

The PLS Ramboll study strongly recommended that from 2001 onwards Cedefop make its best efforts to reduce the breadth of its portfolio and try to focus its efforts more strategically. What we have just shown, however, is that for an organisation like Cedefop in its special institutional setting, the sort of restructuring needed to achieve greater focus has some very special features. First, the founding Regulation – however flexibly drawn – remains the basis on which the prime funder allocates resource. Second, the transaction costs associated with its quadripartite system of governance makes restructuring especially demanding on management time and resources. Third, a flat 6-year funding stream makes the opportunity cost context very much more restricting. To some extent, then, what we can say at this point is that the PLS Ramboll exhortations on Cedefop to re-position itself

and to put more focus into its strategy, while easy to offer, have proved to be vastly more difficult to carry into practice. This is consistent with the general story emerging from the current review that such operational change, as we have been able to observe and document, has been a matter of realignment at the margin. Overall, what we can still see is that Cedefop's interventions appear to be dispersed across a very varied list of activities - comprising conferences and seminars, studies, projects, participation in committees and programmes, publications, dissemination activities, virtual communities and study visits. Indeed, the sheer number of products and services supplied each year is impressive.

6.5 Managing the Operations of the Organisation

According to the IAS report of 2004, it was clear that there were some problems of internal management at Cedefop around that time. Critical comments from the auditors resulted in recommendations concerning the internal control system, weaknesses in the management of human resources, and weaknesses in procurement procedures. An action plan was subsequently drawn up for changes to be introduced and a new management regime installed in 2005. We have not been required for this report to delve into the internal management of Cedefop (and in any case we would have found ourselves reporting on an old system under change over 2001-06). There are, however, some brief observations from the viewpoint of the evaluator that we feel it is important to make regarding human resources issues.

The level of staff morale and the type of mood is difficult to establish for any organisation. This is even more challenging for recalling opinions for past periods of time because it depends on subjective perceptions and selective memories. For this reason we are hesitant to introduce the subject here. We do, however, feel that we have an obligation to give a voice in this report to those who attended the specially convened staff focus group meeting in Thessaloniki. This was attended by 8 staff members selected from within Cedefop. We should particularly stress that participants were asked not simply put forward their own views but to also speak for their colleagues who were not attending the focus group and to consider how other staff members felt about the key challenges Cedefop was facing at the time and possible solutions to these challenges. As already described in Chapter 1, the session was run as a non-verbal technique ensuring anonymity of the views put forward. We were in a position to "triangulate" some of what we heard in this focus group during individual interviews with other Cedefop staff members, the Cedefop Directorate and Governing Board members.

There was a general feeling among the group that, even though Cedefop's Board and its stakeholders appear content with the post-2005 style of the new management and believe that the organisation is being led in the right direction, staff members perceive these

changes in a somewhat different way. The concern expressed in the focus group was that the approach is too heavily weighted toward a "top-down" model and that in absence of "enough trust and information from the Director" there was a "feeling of insecurity" in some quarters. The difficulty of introducing this here is, of course, to judge how generally held the view is and how much of it is no more than the "normal" interplay between staff and senior management experienced in all large organisations. As a potential influence on the efficiency and effectiveness of Cedefop it is, however, a matter that lies within our remit and we raise it only to be constructive. The ability of any organisation to carry out its objectives has much to do with staff motivation and where some sense of insecurity is capable of influencing efficiency and effectiveness it is an issue that needs attention. We believe that taking the staff along with the vision and embedding the new ethos of the organisation from top to bottom in the organisation is going to be important to the next stage of development for Cedefop⁴².

Another of the human resources issues to be confronted by an agency like Cedefop is that in relation to recruitment and staffing there is formal procedure to be followed. This involves the approval by the European Parliament of an annual *Establishment Plan* for staff by number and by grade. An externally generated problem for Cedefop's efficiency is that from time to time (we noted this for 2006) a shortfall in revenue absorption can arise when staff posts authorised in the plan are left unfilled because of the demands of the regulatory system in place⁴³. This represents another of the background conditions for the organisation that can deflect it from planning for what it really needs and then following through to assemble the staff needed to do it. In the face of rapid change and the need for flexibility of response we need to point once again to the *particularity* of the managerial constraints under which a European agency like Cedefop finds itself working.

Discussions within Cedefop on this subject raised the subject of recruitment procedures. The current recruitment procedures of Cedefop seem to involve long timescales for completion which may have a negative influence on the ability to meet the demands of the

⁴² In response to airing this issue we have been made aware that some steps have already been taken to address it and we are happy to report them here. The new Directorate has, for example, been re-organising and improving the Intranet (a "Directors Corner" has been introduced where the Directors inform the staff about what they are doing and what kinds of decisions have been taken. Management decisions are also published in the 'news' section of the Intranet). Induction seminars have also been introduced for new members of staff where they are informed, among other things, of the administrative and procurement procedures (following the EU guidelines) and provided with information on what to do if they find irregularities or evidence of fraud. Recently (September 2007) an Awayday was organised where staff were invited to express their opinions and give the management feedback on issues such as increasing motivation, better internal communication, Cedefop's strategic repositioning and so on.

⁴³ Following this, we were informed that as per November 2007, Cedefop was able to fill its establishment plan, with the exception of one post reserved for one person in secondment who will be back in 2009.

establishment programme. The reasons given to us for this difficulty included the following: the very high number of applications received for each post; lengthy EU and internal administrative procedures requiring selection panels to be set up and following distinct selection stages for each advertised post and the absence of modern online application procedures. These are issues that clearly need to be addressed and we understand that here too steps are being taken in this direction including, among other measures, plans for on-line applications for 2008.

At this point in the report – having looked at the issue of resources and management - we need to follow through to capture some measurement of the output that Cedefop delivered to its constituency of users and stakeholders over the review period in concert with its declared objectives. We have not been able to assemble a comprehensive view of monitored outputs for 2001-2006 but we have been able to produce partial measures by using proxy indicators of various kinds. We have gone as far as we can in broad overall terms and in what follows we shift the level of resolution downwards to look at more specific clusters of activities grouped around the key dimensions of the Intervention Logic set out in Chapter 4. As we do this the key messages to carry forward from this chapter are those emphasising that Cedefop has had "flat-line" funding with virtually no growth in real terms and that the staff complement has been virtually static over the period. This has been the case during a half-decade of the most dramatic change in the external action environment the organisation has been called upon to deal with.

7.0 Measuring Effectiveness and Impact

The key evaluation questions for this section of the report:

Effectiveness: How effective has Cedefop been in achieving its objectives?

Impact and Value Added: What impact did Cedefop make overall and how far has it added value in the development of VET in the EU?

7.1 Putting Cedefop's Objectives into Operation

7.1.1 Returning to the Intervention Logic

At this point in the study we turn our attention back to Chapter 4 – the Intervention Logic for Cedefop and the array of objectives that makes it up. What we saw earlier was an organisation delivering a set of clearly ordered objectives. The general and over-riding aim was to *develop and promote VET at EU level* - as set by the requirements of the 1975 Regulation that established Cedefop in the first place. Subordinate to this were two specific objectives – one that has been a core feature of strategy from the outset - *acting as a reference centre for VET* and the other - *supporting the implementation of EU VET priorities* - marking the more recent realignment of Cedefop toward a more proactive role in assisting policy development (see Chapter 5). At the level of organisational action, these were converted into the 5 operational objectives that it is our task to explore in what follows.

We listed the operational objectives in Section 4.4.1 as the following:

- 1) Carrying out research in European VET systems & issues
- 2) Reporting, Collecting, Analysing VET information at EU level
- 3) Disseminating VET information across Europe
- 4) Providing technical and scientific advice
- 5) Promoting co-operation & exchanges of best practice

Over the period 2001-2006 Cedefop has been using those resources we examined in Chapter 6 to carry out these objectives. In doing so it has had to live within the means available to it and find effective ways to respond to those changes in the external action environment for VET in Europe that we briefly explored in Chapter 2. We have already examined in Chapter 5 how things were realigned strategically over the 6 year period and how Cedefop has responded to a complex pattern of influences on it - not just externally but also internally under the influence of its stakeholders on the Board of Management.

7.1.2 Measuring success – some methodological issues

What we now turn our attention to is the deceptively simple question – *did Cedefop carry out these objectives successfully?* We need, however, to tackle this straightforward question in context; i) by setting out some of the complexities of different preferences by users who are looking for different things and; ii) by indicating, in respect of the agreed methodological approach, what we can and cannot measure with confidence.

As a starting point we need to acknowledge the importance for any judgement of success of what might be called the "*in whose interests*" question. As was clear from our exploration of the "relevance" of Cedefop's actions in Chapter 4, "success" or its opposite depends on who is being asked and about what. What we were able to present evidence for in that Chapter was that **on balance** most of Cedefop's clients seemed happy that the objectives were generally the right ones and that they were being successfully carried out. There were differences in shades of opinion for different declared objectives but the overall weight of opinion was clear.

Within this generally positive response we did, however, find some differences in respect of what we have called the (older) *open source* aim and the (more recent) *policy development support* aim. Underlying this was undoubtedly a methodological problem coming, on the one hand, from the generality of the question "how far has Cedefop contributed?" and, on the other, from averaging the responses of interest groups with quite different expectations about "success" as it relates to them. To get closer to a resolution of this aggregation problem we need to dig down further into the detail of at least some of the operational activities that constitute each broad objective and then marshal whatever measures we can to gauge success.

A second complication for answering the question of "how successful" is the issue of *against what criteria* survey respondents were judging their answers. Did those who answered our questions have some alternative provider or objective measure of value, for example, against which they were comparing Cedefop? We would judge that for the most part the answer was "no". If there was a comparator it depended on the sort of product or service under discussion. Where, for example, it was a simple matter of advice and

assistance on VET in relation to day to day business, the national VET platform (and some private suppliers perhaps) could at least be conceived of as an alternative source. We found some evidence for this from our limited discussions with DGVTs and from some of the "write in" responses to the surveys. But it was highly differential. Many of the EU15 Member States were well equipped to operate over some of Cedefop's basic open source activities. There was, however, a strong response from the newer Member States that without Cedefop they would have struggled even at this basic level.

But where the requirement was for EU-wide VET information, research and policy development advice we are on safer ground to assume that judgments about the success of Cedefop have more to do with its ability to *add value* on a terrain where it has no competitor. Then, of course, the question of "faute de mieux" can kick in – but since there is no way of dealing with this, we must take the answers at their face value. The responses we were hearing in this case were perhaps less about gauging the relative success of Cedefop (since there is nothing to be "relative" about) - and more about how the respondents felt it might be able to do better.

To resolve some of the issues just raised, the case for taking the analysis down to lower levels – operational activity or even projects or tools - is unassailable and it was part of our brief to do this. However, with six years to cover for an organisation as wide-ranging in its portfolio as Cedefop, a significant *methodological challenge* had to be confronted. We needed to be *selective* - both in the activities looked at and in the research instruments applied. The right balance would be to capture as wide-ranging a view of Cedefop's activities as we could whilst being consistent with making the analysis as cost- and time-efficient and rigorous as possible. In this respect we need to set out some key principles, first about fairness and integrity, and secondly about selectivity.

7.1.3 Making judgemental observations – some key principles

Beginning with *principles*, our position as investigators is that we shall try only to make judgments where we can set out some evidence to support them. We propose, however, to be less constrained about giving advice on possible improvement options where we believe this will be helpful. This means that in what follows we limit our judgemental observations to the evidence coming from those evaluation instruments and expert inputs agreed to at the outset of the contract – the user survey, the intermediary bodies survey, the suite of face-to-face interviews, the in-depth case studies, desk research and the expert opinions of senior qualified Ecotec staff with acknowledged expertise in a specialist field.

Turning to the issue of *selectivity*, a number of choices were made (after due consultation with the Steering Group) about the activities that we would examine in greater depth –

largely through additional case studies. These activities were selected because Cedefop saw them as strategic activities reflecting Cedefop's refocusing on a policy support role. The downside of selecting these case studies is, of course, that many other Cedefop activities did not receive the same in-depth treatment - rendering evaluative judgements inappropriate. However, we believe that it would be equally inappropriate to ignore the sheer breadth of the *activity portfolio* in which the more intensively-studied activities are embedded. To achieve a compromise over this we have invited Cedefop to contribute to this Chapter by making its own selection of "key headline activities" and then to offer succinct factual descriptions of each in the text. We feel that this is essential to lead us into Chapter 8 - Conclusions and Recommendations - from a platform that sees the activities of Cedefop *in the round*.

7.1.4 Consolidated objectives

The perspective that guides this entire study is one based on the *Intervention Logic* for Cedefop and the array of general, specific and operational objectives that makes it up. To try to run this through the material that follows we have had to "engineer" some commonality between the broad structure of Intervention Logic objectives and those Activity Areas through which Cedefop manages its work programme⁴⁴. What we have done is to collapse the objectives of Section 4.4.1 into three logical groupings that we have called *consolidated objectives* that enable us to have taxonomic closure with the four Activity Areas currently used by Cedefop. These are labelled:

Information, Communication and Dissemination (CO1);

- Reporting, collecting, analysing and disseminating EU VET information (Operational Objective 2/3);

Cooperation and Exchange of Best Practice (CO2);

- Promoting cooperation and exchanges of best practice (OO5);

Research, Advice and Policy Support (CO3);

- Carrying out research on European VET systems (OO1);
- Providing technical and scientific advice (OO4);
- Supporting the implementation of EU VET priorities (Strategic Objective2);

Far more usefully we see this as offering a synoptic view of what we believe in any case to be the *intrinsic organisational logic* to which the organisation now works⁴⁵. Cedefop was invited (as we have just indicated) to make its own selection of those key headline

⁴⁴ This also enables us to make some observations on the internal coherence of the organisation as it delivers those objectives.

⁴⁵ To achieve this effectively we have adopted the post-2005 structure of Activity Areas and will focus on the latter – and we believe most strategically important – phase of Cedefop's evolution.

activities that fit under each consolidated objective. We begin using this approach by looking at those most coherent and long-established Cedefop activities that come together under the broad heading Information, Communication and Dissemination.

7.2 The Consolidated Objective for Information, Communication and Dissemination

7.2.1 Mapping the Components of Consolidated Objective One

Table 7.1 sets out the broad structure of the material we shall be looking at in this section as we explore activities under the heading for information, communication and dissemination. Column one shows the operational objectives that underpin this area of work. Column two matches these objectives with the relevant Cedefop Activity Areas. Column three is a description provided to us at our request by Cedefop of the headline activities that it sees as sitting under this consolidated objective⁴⁶ and column four sets out the sources of evidence for the study that are used in making judgments about how effective Cedefop has been in carrying out the consolidated objective.

Table 7.1: The Elements of Consolidated Objective One – Information, Communication and Dissemination

CONSOLIDATED OBJECTIVE 1	Cedefop ACTIVITY AREA	HEADLINE ACTIVITIES	EVIDENCE BASED SOURCES
<p>OO2: Reporting, collecting and analysing VET information at EU level</p> <p>OO3: Disseminating information across Europe</p>	Area 'D' Information, communication, dissemination	<p>Collecting, analysing and disseminating information on VET throughout Europe remains one of Cedefop's main tasks. Cedefop has diverse target groups with different information needs. It aims to serve them with relevant, timely, objective, reliable, and where possible, comparable information. To achieve this Cedefop has developed various information collection and dissemination tools. These include Cedefop's networks, news services, databases and information resources and tools, and publications.</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • <i>Networks:</i> Cedefop's networks are tools to collect and disseminate information, exchange experience, stimulate debate and generate ideas. ReferNet (European network of reference and expertise in VET) is Cedefop's primary source of information on VET developments in Member States. ReferNet comprises a consortium of organisations representative of VET in each Member State led by a national coordinator. ReferNet contributes to many projects, providing information for the Copenhagen 	<p>Web Survey</p> <p>IB Survey</p> <p>Interviews</p> <p>Refernet Case Study</p> <p>Review of the websites</p> <p>Review of library service</p> <p>Review of external communication</p> <p>Analysis of</p>

⁴⁶ The requirement was for a straightforward description of the relevant activity and we have taken the responsibility for removing any elements of "self-judgement" from the material supplied.

CONSOLIDATED OBJECTIVE 1	Cedefop ACTIVITY AREA	HEADLINE ACTIVITIES	EVIDENCE BASED SOURCES
		<p>process, many of Cedefop's information databases and news items.</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • <i>Databases and information resources:</i> Cedefop's ETV databases hold information on VET in Europe for policy-makers, researchers, practitioners and other VET professionals to support decision-making and knowledge-sharing. The European Research Overview supports the exchange of knowledge and information for the research community by providing an online database on researchers, research projects (EU and national), and research papers. The National VET systems database (eKnowVet), created in 2003 is a reference tool for cross-national descriptive information on VET. It now covers all 27 Member States (plus Iceland and Norway). Information is held in the database by theme and by country. Cedefop's library collects and disseminates information about VET in the EU from Member States, and European and international organisations. Through Cedefop's ETV the library also provides online tools to support scientific analysis and research. VET-Bib has over 60 000 references along with the European training thesaurus a multilingual tool for indexing VET related publications.. • <i>Publications:</i> Cedefop's publications, many of which are available online, aim to make the results of Cedefop's project work accessible and tangible. They also support knowledge-sharing and when effectively targeted can contribute to policy development. Over the period 2001 to 2006, Cedefop has published 30 to 40 new titles every year and disseminates around 20 000 information items each year (around 9 000 in response to requests for specific publications, the rest at exhibitions). National descriptions provide a contextual reference and rationale for available policy options within Member States. Specifically to support the two countries that hold the EU presidency each year, Cedefop prints short descriptions of their VET systems and disseminates them at meetings and events. • <i>News on VET:</i> Cedefop provides a news service online on the home page of its Electronic training village (ETV) (www.trainingvillage.gr) and through the monthly ETV newsletter, which has around 2 500 subscribers. Cedefop info, published in German, English and French is available online and in print, also provides updates of VET policy developments in Europe and has around 8 500 subscribers 	<p>literature and background documentation</p>

7.2.2 Cedefop in communication with the wider world

What we are looking at here is that set of key activities that provide the essential underpinning for Cedefop's original strategic mission as a *reference centre for EU VET*. This is the most clear-cut of its specific objectives and has, until recently, been the dominant driving force of its activities. We have seen already that this Activity Area consumes a significant proportion of the organisation's staff and non-staff costs (tables 6.2, 6.3 and 6.4). Put simply what we are looking at here is whether or not Cedefop has been successful in maximising the impact of its reference centre operations on what is a structurally and thematically diverse and geographically extensive customer community.

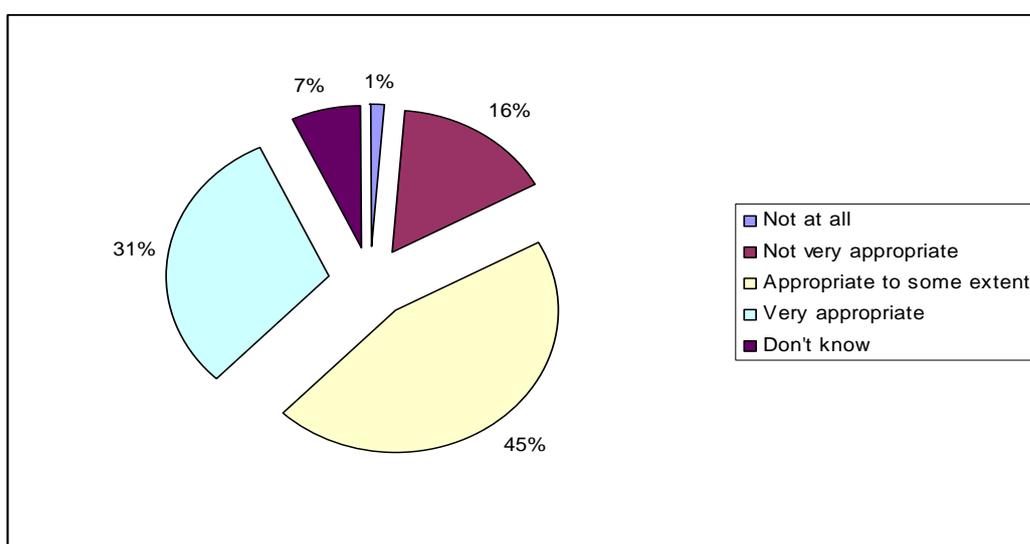
In carrying out this key component of its mission over the review period Cedefop has, of course, been operating against a stream of rapid and continuous change in the technological paradigm for gathering, communicating and disseminating information. Associated with this there has been rapid change in the preferences of users and customers as to how they expect to garner the information they need in the context of the new technologies. The arrival of the Information Society has created a more sophisticated marketplace of customers in general and has raised expectations for just-in-time information products customised to their individual needs and delivered through multiple channels. To cope with these new demands most information-intensive organisations - and Cedefop is no exception - have tended to find themselves meeting the challenge by incremental change and an accretion of new facilities while consciously aiming "at some point in the future" comprehensively to restructure. Judging success or effectiveness in any objective sense in this area of Cedefop's work against such a fast-moving backdrop has to be more a matter of impression than objective measurement. What we have tried to do in what follows is to "take a view" on the basis of the range of evidence we assembled. It is necessarily a partial one but we believe there are some important lessons to emerge. We begin with a synoptic overview of responses from our web survey evidence.

7.2.2.1 *Customers' views on information, communication and dissemination – survey evidence*

A critical objective for Cedefop is to act as a window, a hub and a gateway in respect of VET across Europe. Using the two survey instruments for the study we solicited the views of the user community on this aspect of the organisational mission. Respondents to the web surveys were asked the question 'from your experience, to what extent do you think that the dissemination and communication activities of Cedefop are appropriate to enable organisations and individuals across Europe gain higher awareness and knowledge of VET systems and practices?' Figures 7.1 and 7.2 summarise the responses received.

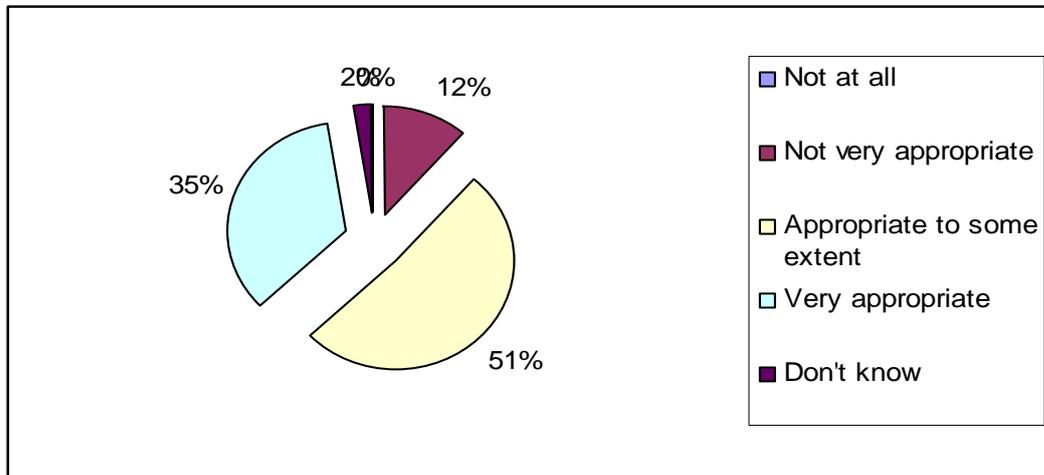
The view from the wider user community on dissemination and communication activities was broadly positive with 31% satisfied that they were "very appropriate" and 45% believing they are "appropriate to some extent". Similarly, 35% of IB respondents considered that Cedefop dissemination and communication activities were 'very appropriate' and another 51% believed them to be 'appropriate to some extent' (51%). Significantly, the most positive ratings came from the NLOs/TSAs (89% 'very appropriate' or 'appropriate to some extent').

Figure 7.1 Do the dissemination and communication activities of Cedefop enable organisations and individuals across Europe to gain a higher awareness and knowledge of VET systems and practices?



Source: ECOTEC Research & Consulting, 2007 (survey among users of Cedefop's products and services)

Figure 7.2 Intermediary Body perspective on dissemination and communication activities of Cedefop enabling organisations and individuals across Europe gain a higher awareness and knowledge of VET systems and practices



Source: ECOTEC Research & Consulting, 2007 (Intermediary Body survey)

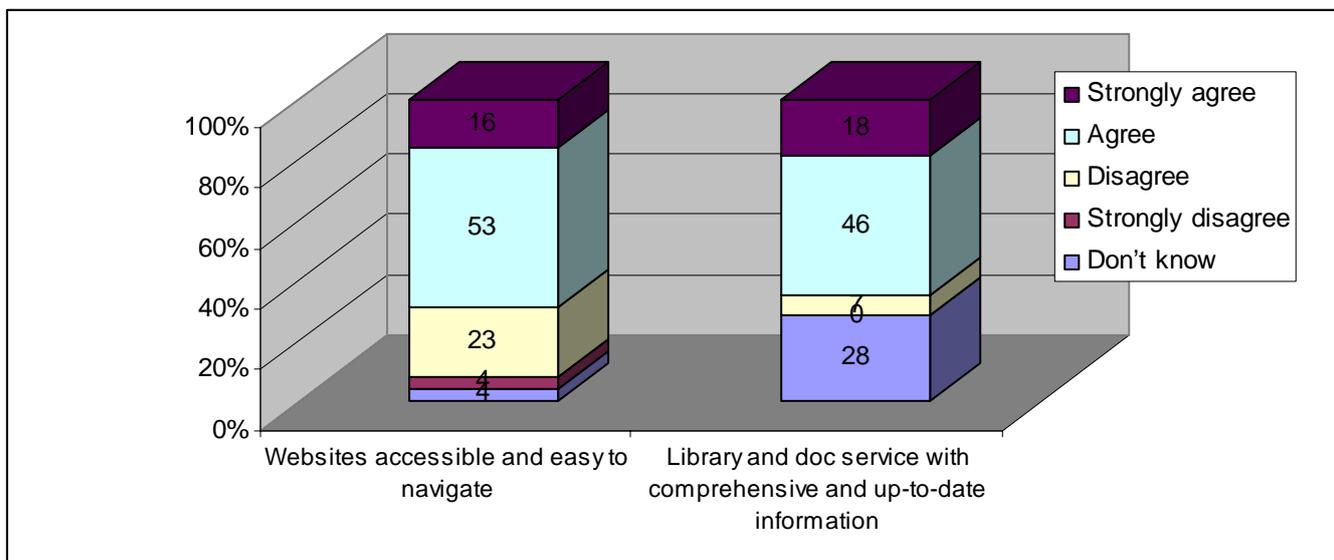
Underlying these broadly supportive responses there were some interesting variations in opinion and a number of users believed that dissemination activities could be improved in some respects. On web survey questions that explored "which activities should remain the same or be modified", 25% of respondents to the IB survey (and interestingly 40% of ReferNet respondents) indicated that the dissemination activities of Cedefop should be modified in some way.

We can use Figure 7.3 to dig down into some of the detail of how in the dissemination and communication activities were regarded by the wider community of general users. Two discrete areas are explored – the websites and the library and documentation services. The focus of the questions is on ease of use, being informative and useful and being comprehensive and up-to-date respectively. Beginning with the broad message from these two activities, it is again clear that the bulk of the users see Cedefop meeting its objectives effectively. Just more than half (53%) report this for the website and just less than half (46%) for the library and documentation service. However, when we look at the internal variations across the categories we can find some interesting points to make.

Looking at the website for example, only 16% of the user community respondents strongly agreed with the statement that *"the websites are accessible and easy to navigate"* while 27% disagreed or strongly disagreed that this was the case. This reveals a significantly higher pattern of negative response for the web sites. Turning to the column for the library and documentation service, the feature that immediately meets the eye is that almost 30%

of users do not know whether or not it "provides comprehensive and up-to-date information" and only 18% clearly agree that it does do this. It is difficult to know the provenance of this but a possible explanation is that the large proportion of users who see Cedefop exclusively via the web might legitimately not know about the library and documentation service *per se* – even though some of its materials are accessible by this route. We will take these broad issues into consideration at this point and turn to some of the more general observations on information, communication and dissemination that came from both the "write in" elements of the surveys and from the suite of interviews for the study.

Figure 7.3 The value of specific products and services



Source: ECOTEC Research & Consulting, 2007 (survey among users of Cedefop's products and services)

7.2.2.2 Customer observations on information, communication and dissemination

The material for this section was garnered from a variety of "softer" sources and in using it we need to repeat a reporting principle. We need to avoid giving judgemental weight to individual opinion where it cannot be lined up with other similar views from a known group or triangulated with evidence from other sources. We do, however, feel that some of the points made can legitimately be used as helpful suggestions to assist Cedefop in reviewing its activities⁴⁷.

A number of web survey respondents and other user-oriented interviewees noted that they found the websites complex, that they had difficulties finding information on them and that

⁴⁷ We reviewed the status of the Web sites using our own in-house expert between July 22 and July 24 2007 and would be happy to offer more details, if required

they do not understand the need to log in to access certain information. Many interviewees indicated that the website is difficult to navigate if you are new to it and that you can only find things if you know your way around the website. The need to make the website more user-friendly was stressed by 7 of the 12 users interviewed from the wider user community. Smaller numbers maintained that the website should allow customisation (4 out of 12 users interviewed) and that more material should be made available free of charge and online (2 users out of 12 interviewed). Suggestions for improvements from users centred around the establishment of practical, customer-oriented and user-friendly instruments (e.g. more statistical data hosted on the websites, establishment of project databases and archives of VET documentation together with the use of more languages.

These impressions are buttressed by the following brief selection of views from the "write in" user comments on the surveys.

"Information is too scattered, too slow, too many islands and databases".

"An integrated approach would be more useful, especially for policy makers"

"There is simply too much information, and the information is too hard to find"

These points from the users can be regarded as lending weight to the point flagged up in the previous section about the *accessibility and ease of use of the web site materials*. But the story is not one-way. On the positive side, the news element of web activity seems particularly well received. Users stated that they:

- "Prefer receiving news in electronic format and the ETV Newsletter is widely appreciated";
- "The ETV Newsletter is highly valued: it gives a good overview on key issues and information on VET events";

Indeed, the steady increase in the number of subscribers to the ETV Newsletter from 1,400 in 2001 to 3,325 in 2006, confirms that this format of circulating news has been gaining ground with customers.

News and the timeliness of its provision seem to bring something to bear on the relatively less enthusiastic responses that we saw in Figure 7.3 on aspects of the library and information service. Again, we offer some of the comments from users to help us dig deeper with respect to *printed* as opposed to web output:

- "Cedefop Info is badly laid out, difficult to read, and usually out of date by the time I receive it";
- "The information (e.g. about seminars and events) comes late so there is no time to participate";
- "The news items available in print format could be updated more regularly as they quickly lose their value after publication"

While issues such as layout can be a matter of individual perception these three verbatim responses seems to flag up an issue with respect to the issue of "up-to-dateness" of information from print sources. This is, of course, just one aspect of the role played by the information services of Cedefop and to balance it we need to put on record that the library and documentation service part of the Cedefop information services, was accredited with ISO 9001:2000 in 2004, indicating that external assessors see it as offering a professional and robust approach to information resources. Invisible to the outside users, of course, the physical library in Cedefop also provides its staff with an important resource, and the resource itself has particular value as a coherent and well structured archive of European VET material with no peer.

7.2.2.3 *Broad measures of impact and effectiveness for information, communication and dissemination*

Continuing to build up a view of how successful Cedefop has been in delivering the consolidated objective for information, communication and dissemination we have used materials sourced from inside Cedefop to generate a dataset of broad output measures (Table 7.8). Cedefop has made efforts itself to measure the 'consumption' of its outputs in a broad quantitative manner and this has taken on a more sophisticated form in recent years. For example, in 2006 it produced a document *Visibility analysis 2006: Citations to Cedefop and its Products*. In the document the measures focus on the extent to which Cedefop is mentioned in directories and guides, inclusion of Cedefop publications in external bibliographies and databases, citations of the Journal articles, link popularity analysis on the Web, and a Web site positioning analysis that also covers access statistics to the Web site. A further document is *The Impact of Cedefop: Citations and References to Cedefop and Its Products 2006*.

We have taken account of both documents but it has been our particular task to try to gain a consistent picture over the entire period 2001-2006. To achieve this we have made our best efforts to construct a balanced data series at the expense of a necessary degree of simplification. We have drawn the material from the full set of Annual Reports and Court of Auditors' Reports over the period. Where we have been able to interface with those more comprehensive studies referred to above has been where some of their findings have been drawn into the relevant Annual Reports for 2004, 2005 and 2006.

Table 7.2: Information, Communication, Dissemination Outputs

YEAR	2001	2002	2003	2004	2005	2006
Queries answered by the library reference desk	1,985	2,079	1,956	1,892	2,645	1,824
Subscriptions to Cedefop Info		8,521	8,523	8,460	8,543	8,498
Subscriptions to ETV newsletter	1,400	1,862	2,369	2,427	3,160	3,325
Registered ETV users	28,506	36,614	40,173	53,167	60,440	65,104
ETV page views	449,000	2,929,144	2,529,687	3,306,920	3,366,490	3,583,478
Number of Cedefop website page views					4,496,527	1,881,967
Number of Cedefop website visits					1,331,294	909,215
Number of successful hits for Cedefop website	3,520,274	9,459,340	20,323,484	28,016,452	18,833,390	11,072,955
VET Bib (bibliographic database)	39,000 entries	42,758 entries	43,000 entries	43,000 entries	55,000 entries	Not available

YEAR	2001	2002	2003	2004	2005	2006
Circulation of documents (number of distributed copies upon request)	13,427	8,809	9,805	10,293	8,528	8,733
Pages requested for translation	11,793	12,808	11,592	13,403	10,066	10,424
Citations of 'Cedefop'	23	43	26	71	83	18 (Jan- May 2006)
Conferences and seminars			72	90	90 with an average of 24 participants	
AGORA Conferences	3	3	2	2	3	1 (& prep started for 2 in early2007)
Total number of Publications	38	32	68	62	60	36
Of which, number of issues of Cedefop Info	2	3	3	3	4	3
Of which, number of issues of EJVT	2	3	3	3	3	4
number of titles produced (non periodicals) for sale	7	8	7	3	7	2
number of titles produced (non periodicals) free of charge	18	24	19	28	32	25

Source: Table Compiled from Cedefop documentation including:

- Court of Auditors' reports for the financial years 2001, 2002, 2003, 2004, 2005, 2006(unpublished)
- Reference desk statistics: progress report 2003-2006, supplied by Cedefop
- Cedefop Visibility Analysis, produced by the Cedefop Library and Documentation service in 2006
- Cedefop Annual Reports for the years 2001, 2002, 2003, 2004, 2005, 2006

Table 7.2 shows a number of interesting features. At the most general level of observation it is the overall stability of the outcomes that stands out most clearly. The year on year variation is broadly within a narrow band – with a few exceptions. Now that we have the benefit of the financial data series assembled for Chapter 6 this is perhaps less surprising in that stable year-on-year funding and the challenges of what we described earlier as "turning the tanker" would tend to predicate such an outcome. The output items that have increased dramatically have been registered ETV users and ETV newsletter subscribers and citations of Cedefop have gone up sharply from 2001 to 2005. This is consistent with an emergent theme for this section that the ETV Newsletter has been increasingly effective for Cedefop as a means of engaging with its wider user community. As we also saw in Chapter 4 Cedefop is also increasingly making its presence felt as a 'brand' with an increasing citation count.

For the bulk of the other items in the table – queries answered, subscriptions to Cedefop Info, VET Bib, document circulation, pages for translation, non-periodical publications and so on - though some have seen variations, the pattern has been a steady one. Only the number of successful hits to the Cedefop website can be seen to have fallen significantly in recent years but Cedefop explains this has more to do with the decreased number of pages after the redesign of the Cedefop website in 2006 and the fact that the site is currently only available in English. Through the window available to us here Cedefop has been carrying on doing what it has been mandated to do and operating within a regime of flat-line funding. We can read off from this that, as far as we can see, it has indeed been *effective* in carrying out the information, communication and dissemination component of its mission.

We are required also to make some observations on impact as well as effectiveness and in this respect we have more difficulty in coming to a judgement. As we have seen in the last section the easily accessible data for this consolidated objective have tended to measure utility and effectiveness through a series of counts that gauge its visibility and user impressions of its usefulness. This is fine as far as it goes but to measure impact more would be needed. It is less what immediate use people made of Cedefop's products and services and more what final outcomes for the development of VET this use could be seen as having generated. We have no direct evidence for this in relation to information, communication and dissemination as a stand-alone activity but we offer Table 7.3 as a set of proxy indicators that can help to make the link (for 2006 and early 2007) between this set of general communication activities by Cedefop and those key policy forums that have the duty to shape the European VET policy terrain. What is clear is that in impact terms Cedefop has been the source (even for such a short period) of what can only be described as an impressive array of key reports, syntheses, articles, presentations and reviews that have reaches into the "policy heartland" for VET. The information, communication and

dissemination function has then done its job in projecting Cedefop's work into policy in a way that, while we cannot in any sense quantify it, will have had *significant impact*.

Table 7.3: The impact of Cedefop activities related to external communication

Impact indicator	Target Group	Details
Presentations of Cedefop outputs to national and European decision-makers	European Parliament	2006: 1 presentation on the research report to MEPs in Thessaloniki 2007: April AGORA conference attended by MEPs
	Council of the EU	Presentation of synthesis report to Informal Ministerial meeting in Helsinki
	Directors General of VET	Presentation on synthesis report in DGVT meetings, ACVT meeting and ETCG meeting.
	Cedefop Governing Board and Bureau	Presentation of the 3rd research report Presentation on synthesis report Skillsnet presentation
	Directorates General of the European Commission	DG EAC DG EMPL supports SKillsnet work on a European skills forecasting model DG ENT
	Peer institutes	3 presentations or interventions about the research report (including OECD Network B (indicators of education and labour market) meeting, Washington; OECD Social outcomes of learning symposium, Eurofound seminar, Dublin) Presentation to OECD Network B on Skillsnet
	External events	2 presentations or interventions about the research report (including Italian Ministry of Education, Catania). 2 presentations on VET financing Presentation on synthesis report at the Finnish Presidency Conference on Policy Support

Impact indicator	Target Group	Details
		provided through LdV Skillsnet presentations to 6 external events
Targeted Publications to better inform national and European decision-makers on VET developments and facilitate the design and monitoring of VET policies	Presidency Countries	Panorama Series: Short description of VET system of each Presidency Country attracts interest and requests for 1500 copies while Cedefop provided 600 and receives regular requests for electronic and hard copies. VET Info Point Series: Booklet 'Spotlight on VET' offering a quick overview of national VET system disseminated broadly in Cedefop events, study visits and through ReferNet (15,000 copies produced).
	European Parliament	2-page briefing notes for MEPs
	Council	Summary for Informal Ministerial meeting
	Directors Generals of VET	Periodic reviews of VET developments for the DGVTs (distributed during Presidency events)
Articles by Cedefop included in external publications		- Two articles prepared for the research report for the KIST-VER Newsletter, n°2/2006 and for the Proceedings of the Copenhagen Symposium, CERI, 2006. - Two articles on skills needs were prepared for other institutes (UNESCO-UNEVOC, IWAK) - E-learning also reports having 'input for European conferences, seminars and workshops as well as articles in journals.' - Article on VET-Bib written for Eurydice Italia

Source: ECOTEC, based on review of Cedefop documentation

7.2.3 A Specific System for Collecting and Analysing European VET Data - ReferNet

At this point in "digging down" to get an impression of how Cedefop actually delivers its objectives we can turn our attention to a more detailed case study examination of one of the core activities that Cedefop undertakes in the sphere of information, communication and dissemination. The European Network of Reference and Expertise in VET (ReferNet)

is a networked system for collecting and disseminating information and represents a transversal activity for Cedefop, supporting other areas and external users. ReferNet also contributes to a number of other Cedefop products such as the VET-Bib, eKnowVet and ERO Base databases.

ReferNet was launched in April 2002 as a continuation of the Documentary Information Network that ran for over 12 years before that. The initial documentary activity was extended to include reporting and analysis activities previously undertaken by external contractors. The network started with 17 countries in 2002 (EU15 plus Norway and Iceland), then 27 countries in 2004 and from 2007 covers 29 countries. ReferNet supports Cedefop in carrying out the task assigned to it by the Founding Regulation “... to compile selected documentation relating in particular to the present situation, the latest developments and research in the relevant fields, and to matters of vocational training structures...” and the founding regulation specific objective of disseminating all relevant information in the Member States. Table 7.4 provides a summary overview of the complex series of elements that make up ReferNet.

Table 7.4: Overview of ReferNet activities

Type of activity	Description
ReferNet	<p>ReferNet comprises a national consortium in each Member State, Iceland and Norway, made up of organisations representative of VET. Each national consortium has a research capacity and is led by a national co-ordinator, responsible for setting up the consortium and ensuring delivery of the work. The national consortium brings together key organisations involved in VET issues, where public organisations, social partners and VET researchers discuss and exchange information on European, national and regional issues and sectoral approaches. Network activities focus on collecting and exchanging documentation and information on developments in VET policy and research. Dissemination and promotion of Cedefop work and products in member countries also falls within ReferNet’s remit. ReferNet also provides opportunity for consortium members to broaden contacts with other European organisations.</p> <p>eKnowVet is Cedefop’s database for storing descriptive information submitted by each Member State (plus Norway and Iceland) through ReferNet. This eKnowVet database classifies information according to key VET-related themes. eKnowVet comprises three products: thematic overviews (national overview of all themes); detailed thematic analyses (in-depth description of national systems for each theme); and comparative presentation (a cross-country summary presentation for each theme based on the information submitted in the detailed thematic analyses).</p> <p>ReferNet contributes to the eknowVet database by providing two types of input annually: a thematic overview; and a detailed thematic analysis. Contributions are</p>

Type of activity	Description
	<p>inputted by ReferNet into an interface (with a direct link to the database and to the ETV). ReferNet contributions are defined in detail by templates created by Cedefop and all countries must follow this template. Information submitted by ReferNet Cells is checked by Cedefop to ensure that it answers the questions specified in the template, they are also (to different degrees) edited for language and content.</p> <p>Information is published in the 'National VET Systems' section on the ETV under the responsibility of ReferNet. Information can be viewed thematically across two or more countries or by country. The information submitted is also used by Cedefop to produce comparative studies (also published on the ETV).</p>

7.2.3.1 *The elements of the ReferNet model*

The essence of ReferNet is to provide an efficient and effective means for collecting and coherently analysing Europe-wide documentation and information on developments in VET policy and research. The author, coordinator and central hub of ReferNet is Cedefop and the dispersed elements of its wide-reaching European network are *national consortia* operating in each EU Member State, Iceland and Norway. Each national consortium is expected to have a degree of research capacity and is led by a *national co-ordinator* responsible for setting up the in-country consortium and ensuring delivery of the work. The national consortium is intended to bring together the key organisations involved in VET in the country (that is, public bodies, social partners and VET researchers).

ReferNet is, then, a network at two levels: the *national-level network* where a consortium of key VET actors operates in each country and the *European-level network* that brings together the assembled information, intelligence and analysis provided by the national ReferNet consortia. Dissemination and promotion of Cedefop work and products in the member states also lies within the ReferNet remit while, in return, the national consortia expect Cedefop to valorise and disseminate their outputs to the wider European community.

As a concept the ReferNet network model has enormous potential value as a vehicle for assembling a wide variety of context-specific information and intelligence on VET over 29 nations; for assembling at the same time a community of interested parties with the knowledge to analyse and make sense of it all and for offering a self-activating mechanism for communication and dissemination. What we need to look at here is how it works at

the level of practice (effectiveness) and what real value (impact) it delivers for the European VET project as a whole.

A number of things are needed to make such a complex model as ReferNet work. Among them, there is the key question of available finance and – closely related to this – national "buy in". Where there is a positive resolution on both money and commitment, success - if not guaranteed - is rendered more likely. A key over-riding issue is the "*in whose interests*" question that we have already encountered. From this viewpoint there is clearly a politics (small "p") to using network models like ReferNet and in view of this, however sound the theory, practical outcomes may be less than the originators hope for. In seeing ReferNet as a vehicle through which to make judgements on the success of Cedefop we have to declare at the outset that much of what eventuates may be due to forces over which it can be expected to have little direct control.

It will come as no surprise in view of what has just been said that while ReferNet is a key focus of interest for Cedefop – operating as its "eyes and ears" in the member states - it is not necessarily always seen as equally valuable from the perspective of all the participating national states. This can play through in each country to how powerfully-promoted it is, how well-positioned and competent the consortium is and how representative of the interests of the key VET actors ReferNet is perceived to be. While the views expressed from within Cedefop enthusiastically promoted a willingness to shape ReferNet in cooperation with the national states as partners – seen the other way round there was some suggestion that buy-in and effective participation made for differing national views of the partnership process⁴⁸.

⁴⁸ ReferNet is, as we have said a network of national consortia hubbed through Cedefop for a very clearly defined set of activities. What we have been less able to identify for ReferNet, however, is where it operates as a true multi-level network with the full range of bi-lateral and multi-lateral exchanges country by country in addition to the hub and spoke system we described above

7.2.3.2 The key activities for ReferNet

ReferNet activities fall into four categories. We have set them out in Table 7.5 along with some estimates of their outputs:

- *Reporting and analysing VET issues.* This involves national ReferNet consortia providing Cedefop with regular, descriptive information giving a general thematic overview of their national VET system as well as reporting on developments. This information feeds into Cedefop's eKnowVet database (see table below for details)
- *Research projects and activities at national and/or transnational level.* ReferNet contributes to this task through supporting the implementation of the European Research Overview (ERO) and advising/assisting Cedefop in carrying out its other research activities.
- *Collection of information on VET,* for example, collecting documentary and bibliographical references.
- *Dissemination and promotion.* This requires ReferNet Cells to disseminate the results of other Cedefop activities and to support the promotion activities of Cedefop.

Table 7.5: Types of ReferNet Activities and Outputs produced

Type of activities	Outputs 2006
Establishment/maintenance, leadership and coordination of a representative national consortium of organisations	27 National ReferNet Consortia in operation
Reporting and analysing information on VET systems and developments	<p>Intended Outputs: Thematic overview (national overview of all themes); detailed thematic analysis (in-depth description of national systems for each theme); comparative presentation (a cross-country summary presentation for each theme based on the information submitted in the detailed thematic analyses); input to reports to inform the DGVT on current issues; inputs for Cedefop Info newsletter.</p> <p>Actual Outputs 2006: ReferNet made the following inputs into the eknowVET Database</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Detailed thematic analysis - VET financing: <u>5 reports were published online</u>: Austria, France, Greece, Iceland and Sweden. 4 reports were being finalised (Belgium, Ireland, Netherlands and UK) and 2 reports have not been received yet. <i>Currently, 11/17 reports are online.</i> • Detailed thematic analysis - initial vocational education and

Type of activities	Outputs 2006
	<p>training: <u>8 reports were published online</u>: Finland; Greece; Iceland; Ireland; Latvia; Lithuania; Poland, Slovakia. 5 reports are being finalised and 3 reports have not been received yet. <i>Currently, 19/27 reports are online.</i></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Detailed thematic analysis – continuing vocational education and training: <u>7 reports were published online</u>: Cyprus; Estonia; Iceland; Latvia; Lithuania; Poland and UK. 9 reports are being finalised (Belgium, Czech Republic, Germany, Greece, Hungary, Italy, Malta, Slovakia and the Netherlands) and 2 reports have not been received yet. <i>Currently, 16/27 reports are online.</i> This was the theme required by the 2005-06 ReferNet contracts for the newer Member States. • Detailed thematic analysis – training VET teachers and trainers: <u>10 reports were published online</u>: external contracts were established for the new Member States (excluding Poland) and for Luxembourg. All 10 inputs have been validated by ReferNet and published online by mid 2006. A procedure had been launched and an external contractor was selected to finalise the series by undertaking the final country report for Poland. <i>Currently, 26 /27 reports are online.</i> • Detailed thematic analysis – institutional framework: <u>5 reports were published online</u>: Iceland, Norway, Portugal, Spain and UK. 1 report was being finalised (Austria) and 8 reports had not been received. <i>8/17 reports were online.</i> • Detailed thematic analysis – accumulating, transferring and validating learning: <u>9 reports were published online</u>: Denmark, Finland, France, Germany, Greece, Iceland, Portugal, Spain and Sweden. 2 reports are being finalised (Italy and UK). 6 reports have not been received yet. <i>Currently, 9/17 reports are online.</i> This was the theme requested in the 2005-06 contracts for the EU-15 plus Norway and Iceland. • Comparative presentations: <u>2 comparative presentations were published</u>: <i>Financing VET</i> for 10 European countries and <i>Training VET Teachers and Trainers</i> for 16 European countries (11 additional countries will be integrated by the end of 2006 and be published in 2007). A procurement procedure has been launched and finalised on the comparative presentation of <i>Initial vocational education and training</i>. <p>Thematic overviews: <u>21 reports were published on line</u>: Austria, Czech Republic, Cyprus, Denmark, Estonia, Finland, France, Germany, Greece, Hungary, Iceland, Latvia, Lithuania, Luxembourg, Malta, Norway, Poland, Portugal, Slovakia, Spain and UK. 2 reports are being finalised and 4 reports have not been received yet. <i>Currently, 21/27 overviews are online.</i></p>
Research	<p>Intended Outputs: ERO National Research Reports (ENRRs), an annual overview of research taking place within a country. Inputs for ERO Call mailing list of researchers and to ERO MAP (Monitoring, Analysing and Promoting)</p> <p>Actual Outputs 2006: ReferNet made inputs to the following in 2006:</p>

Type of activities	Outputs 2006
	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • profiles of 837 EU researchers and 875 research projects to ERO Base • ERO National Research Reports (ENRRs) from 25 countries have been prepared and published in the ETV– a summary analysis that allows comparisons to be made has also been undertaken • Round table symposiums took place at two European Research conferences: HRD conference in May 2006 and Educational Research (VETNET) conference in September 2006 <p>Performance indicators put forward by Cedefop: good quality and up-to-date overviews of research (ENRRs) in the Member States are available in the ETV; reports from new Member States and candidate countries available; number of entries in the ERO Base has increased significantly.</p>
Documentary activities	<p>Intended Outputs: Inputs to VET-Bib (an online bibliographical database) and to the online database of key organisations in the VET field at national, European and International levels.</p> <p>Actual Outputs 2006: Approx. 1800 records submitted from ReferNet to VET Bib between Jan and November 2006</p>
Dissemination and promotion	<p>Intended Outputs: mailing lists; announcements; newsletters and news services, national websites, participation in exhibitions, conferences and seminars, contacts with the national press</p> <p>Actual Outputs 2006: 27 national ReferNet websites 85 news items published in ReferNet Extranet privileged news channel and 489 items inserted in ETV news, some of which come from ReferNet</p>

Source: Information on Intended Outputs taken from the ReferNet Call for proposals 2006

Information on Actual Outputs taken from the Cedefop Annual Report 2006 and from the Cedefop 2nd Activity Report 2006 detailing outputs between Jan and Nov 2006

Once again in reviewing the content of the Table it has to be said that the *ambition* embedded in ReferNet and the range of actions that are set in place to achieve it are quite exceptional (we shall look at the outputs in a later section). However, the evidence we have from the responses to the IB web survey indicated that 60% of ReferNet Consortia respondents felt that ‘collecting and analysing VET-related information at EU level’ should be ‘modified’. We take it that this response signals to some degree the concerns of ReferNet respondents (particularly those who are tasked with ‘collecting’ such information) about the way things are currently organised. We shall return to this in more detail at a later stage.

7.2.3.3 *The operational structure of ReferNet*

As we have suggested there appears to be a differential level of recognition, buy-in, and representativeness among the ReferNet partners. This has an important effect on the positioning and shape of consortia membership. In some cases, for example, the participating consortia consist of well-established platforms of key organisations (public bodies, social partners and VET researchers) that in turn bring together representatives from other European networks (Eurydice, Europass etc)⁴⁹. But in other cases there appears to be a lack of that important political legitimacy that comes from a formal link between the ReferNet consortium and the government. In yet another sense, despite strong government links, it is possible to hear suggestions from some countries that the consortium is "not properly representative" of the VET community.

While these sorts of differentials are entirely to be expected with 29 countries involved, they do have the capacity to have an impact on the effectiveness of ReferNet as an instrument for both high quality information and intelligence gathering and for giving national visibility and impact to its activities and outputs. In this respect we have identified an interesting contrast with Eurydice. This is an institutional network for gathering, monitoring, processing and circulating comparable information on higher education systems and policies throughout Europe. In the case of Eurydice the information provided by the national units is "validated" from the beginning through being prepared by departments or ministries of education. ReferNet does not, of course, have the same "statutory" foundation. The arrangements with national consortia are contractual ones between the parties concerned. This gives scope for more flexibility among partners but at the same time can bring in more variability among the possible providers with possible ramifications for the quality of the information and intelligence recovered by Cedefop.

A further issue for this more open contracting model is, of course, that it cannot automatically be used where the need is to assemble *official views* for all Member State governments – as in the case of the Copenhagen process. The ReferNet network offers an important entry point but it has been necessary at certain times for Cedefop to conduct separate surveys of DGVTs. Cedefop's position on this is that ReferNet is essentially designed to provide on-going and *longer-term* information on VET systems and structures. But it finds itself sometimes drawn in to conduct separate surveys to obtain the 'official' view from ministries on particular topics. Interestingly, some of our responses from the DGVTs picked this up – raising issues of survey duplication and "survey fatigue". The suggestion from some was that ReferNet is not a flexible enough approach to provide the up-to-date, timely and validated data needed in the present policy climate.

⁴⁹ In 2006, for example, in 18 out of the 27 countries the national coordinator was sitting in a state VET-related institution

ReferNet's structural issues are now being addressed by a closer involvement of the Governing Board in the panel selecting ReferNet consortia⁵⁰ and more recently, through the creation of a new institutional layer for the network. National Ministries have been asked to nominate a ReferNet representative⁵¹. These will be asked to provide input to the multi-annual work programme; to disseminate Cedefop's information to the national ReferNets; to feed national expertise and viewpoints into the discussions; to support the grant procedure by promoting proposals in their country; and to accompany and monitor contributions from the national beneficiary of the multi-annual grant procedure. These new developments have generated some contrasting views but, in general, there is a shared interest in making the network more representative, legitimate and sustainable.

7.2.3.4 *Financial resources to support ReferNet*

Table 7.6 provides the best estimate we can make of the allocation of resources to ReferNet for 2006 as a representative year. The information has had to be assembled from a variety of different sources (e.g. provisional budget by area, project-service, budget lines, work programme, interviews) many of which contain overlapping elements. Once again, a key difficulty lies in the labour cost element. We were unable to ascertain this for 2006 and have used the 2007 figure which appears in the table as a non-monetary FTE assignment estimated at 1.8 FTE. We were also unable to unpack the real amount committed in the operational budget since it included other elements such as technical support and publications.

Table 7.6 ReferNet Human and Financial Resources in 2006

Year	2006
Total estimated costs of ReferNet activities (Cedefop grant + national contribution, excluding Cedefop labour)	€ 1,700,672
Total estimated grant costs (Cedefop's contribution to ReferNet activities)	€ 727,352
Amount committed (including transversal tasks (e.g. Translation))	€ 827,000
Human resources within Cedefop	1.8 FTE

Source: ReferNet 2006 Grant procedure, Financial Evaluation 2006.

Data on FTEs taken from the Cedefop WorkProgramme 2007

⁵⁰ Cedefop is proposing a member of the Governing Board (GB) to act as external expert in the evaluation committee nominated by the appointing authority

⁵¹ This process included three stages: (1) Governing Board members were asked to indicate to Cedefop the names of person(s) in the national government/Ministries who should be contacted to propose a national ReferNet representative; (2) this contact person was then asked to propose a ReferNet representative (person or organisation); (3) the proposed person/organisation was confirmed by Cedefop and the representative was formally appointed.

What Table 7.6 shows is that the total "value" that could be assigned to ReferNet appears to be of the order of € 1.8 million in a full year (excluding the costs of labour – to be added at an estimated value of 1.8 FTE). Of this, € 0.7 million represents the Cedefop contribution in grant aid to the consortium partners. On top of this around € 100k is assigned to Cedefop "transversal" tasks such as translation and so on. The balance between Cedefop's estimated € 827k operational cost contribution and the overall total is made up by co-finance from the contributing national partners. Simple arithmetic shows two things at the outset. First, with an overall average co-finance contribution to operating costs of only € 59k *per country*, the level of available funding is likely to be an issue bearing on the effectiveness of the ReferNet model as it operates in practice. Second, with Cedefop only contributing 42% overall to the operating costs of the network its financial leverage will probably be less important than its "moral" one to a good cause.

The grant aid to consortium partners is subject to a set of fixed rules. For example, the total Cedefop contribution to partners may not exceed 70% of the eligible costs – which are themselves clearly laid out. At a minimum, therefore, the national consortia are required to find a minimum of 30% of the total estimated eligible expenditure as a condition of entry. An examination of grant amounts as a proportion of the total estimated costs in each country for 2006 illustrates some of the key findings as follows:

- The highest total budget was for Norway (€ 132,129) where Cedefop contributed 21%, while the lowest was €14,266 (Lithuania) with a Cedefop contribution of 70%;
- The Cedefop contribution reached the maximum allowable 70% of costs in only 11 out of 27 countries. These included 5 of the New Member States;
- The Cedefop contribution was less than 50% of total costs for 13 countries including, for example, Spain (33.4%) and the UK (35%);

The total available budget from Cedefop resources is distributed on the basis of three country groups based on population and the allocated amount may not in any circumstances exceed the amounts indicated in Table 7.7. In this respect we are surprised that the tariff is set this way since it leaves 6 of the 10 New Member States that are listed in the table with as little as €19,000 to begin to make their way as members of a long established consortium.

Table 7.7 ReferNet grant amounts available per country

Country groups	Maximum grant amount (of which up to €7,000 dedicated to translation and editing costs and up to €2,000 for national websites)	Average estimated costs of the action in each country group
Country group 1 (population less than 4 mln): Cyprus, Estonia, Latvia, Lithuania, Luxembourg, Malta, Slovenia and Iceland	€ 19,000	€ 41,408
Country group 2 (Population 4-30 mln): Austria, Belgium, Czech Republic, Denmark, Finland, Greece, Hungary, Ireland, the Netherlands, Portugal, Slovak Republic, Sweden and Norway	€ 29,000	€ 65,103
Country group 3 (Population over 30 mln): France, Germany, Italy, Poland, Spain, UK	€ 39,000	€ 95,582

Source: ReferNet 2006 Grant Procedure financial evaluation

It will not come as a surprise to know that overall there was a shared feeling among those interviewed for the case study that the resources available were insufficient for what was being expected of the network. We have already set out in Table 7.5 the range of tasks that ReferNet consortia are expected to carry out and this adds to the impression that it is likely to be goodwill and commitment to the values of the ReferNet concept rather than the level of grant aid that will be the motivator for those participating in it. There are, however, querulous voices. Many organisations involved are generally knowledgeable about conditions in the European data handling marketplace and can be assumed to know the value of their work in the 'open market'. As one commercially minded interviewee put it; *"if you are requesting a market task you need to pay a market rate"*. But despite this, our survey found the national consortium leaders believing that the work undertaken by the Network represented good "value for money" and that the general perception about the work that was undertaken was very positive regardless of the limitations on the resources available.

7.2.3.5 Management and staff resources to support ReferNet

Another surprise to the outsider in looking at Table 7.6 is that only 1.8 FTEs in Cedefop are allocated to what, by any standards, looks like a complex task. ReferNet is a 29 country network operating to a demanding set of task requirements within a regime of close funding regulation. It comes as no surprise that procedural and financial aspects take up most of the available staff time with 29 contracts to administer in accordance with a Service Procedure Manual recently awarded ISO 9000-2001 Quality Management

Certification. We are, of course, aware that the quality and relevance of the data and research for ReferNet is undertaken by Cedefop staff members outside the core ReferNet team depending on where the ReferNet outputs are used (e.g. eKnowVet, ERO, thematic analyses etc). This is a dimension of the resources available to ReferNet hidden in the data. But even with all of this in place we are at one with the sentiments of one of our interviewees in declaring that this arrangement *"leaves little time for other tasks such as the animation of the network, communication and follow up of the national websites"* as well as a *"lack of time to step back and think about improvements"*.

7.2.4 ReferNet as an Instrument for Delivering Cedefop's Objectives for Information, Dissemination and Communication

The assembly of comparable information and intelligence (including research) across Europe is clearly a continuing challenge for the VET field in general. This is especially the case since enlargement. Cedefop has, quite rightly in the light of its Founding Regulation, sought to create its own model for collecting, analysing and disseminating VET information and intelligence covering 27+2 countries. What we have set out in previous paragraphs is an overview of just one instrument designed to do this - ReferNet. It was not our task in this report to conduct an intensive review of ReferNet on its own terms but to examine it in the context of the overall evaluation logic for Cedefop as a whole. The question for us at this point is how successful was ReferNet as a component among Cedefop's activities for delivering the mission to be an effective and efficient *Reference Centre for European VET*.

What we can say without hesitation from what we have seen is that, as a concept, ReferNet appears to us to be well-founded and potentially capable of making a significant impact not just in the realm of data gathering and analysis but also as a device of identifying and exchanging good practice in the spirit of the Open Method of Coordination. When it comes to ReferNet in practice we can return briefly to an examination of the output measures for 2006 set out in Table 7.5 and can add further colour to this from the interviews for the case study and from our discussions with DGVTs. On the basis of this we are able to offer some general observations (rather than judgements) on how the model actually operates. Looking back first of all at Table 7.5, the first impression from the output column is just how comprehensive and wide ranging it is. For one year alone (2006) there were 65 reports along with two presentations and a wealth of other materials. Were we to go through this table of outputs in detail we would be deflected from our main purpose here but it should stand in the record as a measure of what ReferNet is capable of producing. Turning to the views of the consortia managers responsible for it our evidence is that ReferNet is generally well regarded. Given its astonishingly low cost base and the

outputs of Table 7.5 it is difficult to argue against the notion that the network is highly *cost-efficient*.

At this point we can add some impressions given to us by the group of DGVTs interviewed in Lisbon. While they were not always specifically related to ReferNet per se, we can use the following to add to the record on how Cedefop's cross-national efforts on information and intelligence are regarded:

- *"The analytical skills of Cedefop staff are strong, though there are too few staff allocated to research to undertake important data analysis and reporting on a 27 state pan-EU basis";*
- *"Cedefop undertakes a very good role in supporting Member States with data";*
- *"The analytical skills of Cedefop are strong, but we would welcome more participation by Cedefop in activities at national levels, for example through visits to help Cedefop staff understand better the national systems, and to strengthen professional and personal ties";*
- *"More dialogue is needed across European VET agencies and organisations to avoid overlap and duplication of activities";*
- *"Cedefop should stop gathering facts and deliver intelligence. It should create a robust process of creating comparative indicators that, once built, can be passed on to Eurostat to build a coherent base of statistical evidence";*

What seems to come out here is that the relationship between DGVTs and Cedefop is a generally positive one in relation to the sorts of activities that ReferNet undertakes. In particular, there seems to be a clear recognition of the analytical contribution of Cedefop to pan-European VET policy and practice.

We have seen already in Section 7.2.3.2 that 60% of ReferNet Consortia respondents felt that *'collecting and analysing VET-related information at EU level should be modified'*. We can now perhaps shed some light on this from our interviews with them. They identified a number of actions they thought would improve the general usefulness of the outputs, particularly of the reports. These included:

- strengthening the comparative element;
- identifying models and trends;
- integrating further secondary analysis more closely with good practice and innovation, and;
- reviewing the relevance of certain network products and databases.

They also stressed the importance of changing from descriptive material to more evidence-based evaluative material to support policy makers. As one respondent put it; *“what lacks all the time is that when Ministers want to make a speech they want to be able to make some comparison between their country and other countries and if they could have that information from Cedefop, it would give the organisation a clear purpose and contribution to policy development”* Other issues they raised were that for the network to be an effective tool for policy reporting, it is important to increase the visibility of ReferNet at national level. Indeed, it was commonly agreed by ReferNet stakeholders that the visibility of ReferNet at national level in the Member States is not always what it should be. This was not just in terms of the role in data collection but as a means of reinforcing the position of the national consortia as agents in their countries for monitoring change and anticipating trends⁵².

There is also an issue of what is to be collected by mandate and what ReferNet consortia members see as 'fit for purpose' in their own country. The mandate requires a set list of outputs that are applicable to all countries. Perhaps more buy-in could be achieved, they suggested, by moving more to an acknowledgement of what policy makers in-country might value. Consistent with the views of the DGVTs, there were requests that ReferNet reports should become more analytical and focus on specific issues to feed more targeted information into the policy making process at both national and European level.

However, by far the most obvious observation to be made about the operation of ReferNet in practice takes us back to Table 7.6 (and to the country tariffs set out in Table 7.7). The budget available to support what is regarded in the outside world as an important dimension of the overall Cedefop mission seems to us to be surprisingly small compared to the tasks it is required to purchase. The assignment of no more than 1.8 FTEs as the

⁵² Some networks offer interesting examples of a strategy for raising their profile and disseminating of their outputs. In the case of Eurydice, the role of the Heads of National Units in promoting the Eurydice Network is to organise promotional activities directed at their national target audience, as part of an overall promotional strategy coordinated by the EEU. National Unit activities prior to the launch of a new publication include briefing priority contact persons at national level (those within the ministry who are responsible for the subject(s) covered by the publication, or staff in the minister's private office) before it first appears on the Internet. Activities for transmitting Eurydice products to a wider national audience following the launch of a publication include mailings, and participation at meetings and conferences.

human resource allocation within Cedefop seems also very small for the tasks at hand⁵³. What we can take from this material in our role as evaluators is the following:

- as a concept ReferNet appears to be an important component within the cluster of activities that seeks to deliver the consolidated objective for information, communication and dissemination;
- in practice it appears that a very small budget is capable –with the goodwill of the partners – to leverage a quite exceptional level of information and intelligence material;
- it is highly regarded as an instrument by its consortium managers but there is a concern among them that more needs to be done to assist them to raise both their own and ReferNet's profile in-country;
- DGVTs are generally complimentary about the role of Cedefop in analytical skills but are more querulous about its role as a data collection agency and would wish to see it more closely engaged both with Eurostat and OECD and with national systems - the better to perform its vital interpretive role;
- the IB respondents to our survey, though generally satisfied, were looking for changes to the way ReferNet operates – much of which appears to do with securing a higher-level input for interpreting trends, reviewing models and identifying good practice;

In all of this there is a consistent line of argument that – while no serious critique is offered on what is currently being done – an opportunity exists for Cedefop to move ReferNet up the value chain to a more analytical, reflective and interpretive role. This is surely what is already intended by its move from the Library and Information area of Cedefop activity to Research. The evidence set out here verifies the importance that the wider community would ascribe to this. From our point of view as evaluators we would concur. Returning to our core theme we would make the overall judgement that the case study of ReferNet finds it to be certainly *efficient and effective* in delivering the outputs assigned to it. On *impact*, we are in no doubt that it has had an impact though once again this is impossible to quantify but we would affirm the voices of our respondents in saying that there is more opportunity yet to be taken to move ReferNet into a position where it could make the best of the qualities embedded in the original model.

⁵³ As some sign of a shift in thinking, under the restructuring of the Cedefop Operational Areas which took place in mid-2007, ReferNet will move from the old Area D 'Information, Communication and Dissemination' to the new area A 'Research and Policy Analysis'. In addition, Cedefop's own 2006-2008 medium term strategy acknowledges that more effort is required to deliver what is needed to customers - at the right time, in the right format, and through the right channels.

7.2.5 Summary

What then can we make of the success of Cedefop in delivering what we have called the Consolidated Objective for Information, Communication and Dissemination? The ambition here has been to act as what we earlier called a "window, a hub and a gateway in respect of VET (*information and intelligence*) across Europe". We are in no doubt that Cedefop has no peer in this respect. As we pointed out in Section 7.1, effectiveness under these circumstances tends to be measured not on some notion of objective comparison with some feasible alternative but on whether it is "more or less effective" than it could be in the eyes of respondents. This means that any judgments to be made have to be weighted by *how much or how little* improvement seemed to be being recommended by users.

Using this as the criterion leads us to take the view that, on balance, the evidence we have assembled places Cedefop as being *generally very effective* in meeting this critical element of its overall mission. Nowhere (except possibly in relation to the web site and even then on matters chiefly of design and presentation) did we find any significant weight of critical comment. The bulk of the user response was couched in terms of being *positive or very positive* about what was being done and on top of that suggesting improvements. In this respect we believe, on the basis of the case analysis that ReferNet comes out as having a good deal of as yet unrealised potential to be exploited. On the issue of impact, as we have already said, measurement is impossible to achieve in any objectively meaningful sense. What we can, however, say is that the sheer volume and breadth of the information and intelligence material (in the widest sense) that "hubs though" and is analysed by Cedefop is certain to have had a *wide ranging impact* on the way VET has developed in the EU.

7.3 Consolidated Objective Two: Cooperation and Exchange of Best Practice

7.3.1 Mapping the Components of Consolidated Objective Two

As before, Table 7.8 sets out the broad structure of the material we shall be looking at in this section as we explore activities under the heading for cooperation and exchange of best practice. Column one shows (in this case the single) operational objective that underpins this area of work. Column two matches this objective with the relevant Cedefop Activity Area. Column three is again a description provided to us at our request by Cedefop of the headline activities that it sees as sitting under this consolidated objective and column four sets out the sources of evidence for the study that are used in making judgments about how effective Cedefop has been in carrying out the consolidated objective.

Table 7.8: The Components of Consolidated Objective Two - Cooperation and Exchange of Best Practice

CONSOLIDATED OBJECTIVE 2	Cedefop ACTIVITY AREA	HEADLINE ACTIVITIES	EVIDENCE BASED SOURCES
<p>OO5</p> <p>Promoting cooperation and exchanges of best practice</p>	<p>Area 'C' Exchange and supporting partners</p>	<p>Despite being very different, Europe's VET systems share many similar problems. Since the Lisbon Council in 2000 and the launch of the Copenhagen process in 2002 Member States have been working together to tackle problems by learning from each others' experiences. Over this period, Cedefop has worked to strengthen such European cooperation by providing expertise to stimulate exchanges of ideas and common learning. This includes coordinating the study visits for education and VET specialists, supporting the familiarisation of candidate countries, organising conferences, and animating practitioners' networks. Selected activities, representative of Cedefop's work to stimulate VET cooperation and exchange of best practices are:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • From 1985 to 2007, Cedefop managed the study visits programme for VET specialists. The programme provided an opportunity for education and vocational training specialists from different Member States and candidate countries to meet to discuss issues of common interest, share expertise and experience. Between 2001 and 2006, over 300 visits were organised and more than 3 000 people participated. In 2006, the European Commission invited Cedefop to coordinate the consolidated study visits programme for education and training specialists in the new lifelong learning programme from 2008 to 2013. Consolidated study visits, combine the former Arion study visits, for education specialists, with the study visits for VET specialists that Cedefop managed for over 20 years. The new programme has the same objectives but is much larger and will have many more participants each year. Cedefop focuses on the quality, evaluation and results of the visits. Cedefop does not decide the themes of the visits, but encourages that some focus on European VET issues, such as the Copenhagen process priorities and common European tools such as the EQF. Further, given their importance to continuing vocational training, Cedefop encourages participation by social partners in the new programme. • Agora Thessaloniki conferences offer a stimulating broad-based forum in which VET researchers, policymakers and practitioners can meet to exchange views with each other and with social partners, decision-makers in the business and 	<p>Web Survey</p> <p>IB Survey</p> <p>Interviews</p> <p>Study Visits</p> <p>Case Study</p> <p>Analysis of literature and background documentation</p>

CONSOLIDATED OBJECTIVE 2	Cedefop ACTIVITY AREA	HEADLINE ACTIVITIES	EVIDENCE BASED SOURCES
		<p>political worlds, and opinion leaders in the civil society. Between 2001 and 2006, 12 Agora conferences were organised. Over this period the nature of the conferences has changed from smaller scale seminars examining in depth issues such as mobility as a learning tool and learning enterprises, to larger-scale conferences on broader themes open to a wider range of participants. Some Agora conferences, such as those in 2005 to celebrate Cedefop's 30th anniversary, in 2007 to follow-up a ministerial meeting in Helsinki under the Finnish presidency, have had a higher political profile, attended by Commissioners, senior political figures and officials from other Member States. In any event, Agora conferences have increasingly looked at issues related to EU VET policy priorities.</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • The VET Teachers and trainers network (TTnet) was set up by Cedefop in 1998 as a European forum for the training and professional development of VET teachers and trainers. Over its lifetime, TTnet has provided policy recommendations, guidance and tools for VET teachers and trainers and has expanded to comprise 21 national networks of key public and private sector organisations in training VET teachers and trainers. TTnet's has strengthened as raising teaching standards is part of the Education and training 2010 work programme. Since then Cedefop's key role in this context has been to use the work of TTnet to identify the professional development needs of VET teachers and trainers and ensure that are taken into account as well as those of teachers in general education. • Cedefop, working with the European Training Foundation (ETF), provides support to candidate countries by familiarising them with developments in VET in the EU. The two agencies have cooperated since 1997 and agreed a framework for cooperation in 2001. During the period 2001-2006, Cedefop has supported the familiarisation of 12 new Member States and is currently supporting three candidate countries, Croatia, the former Yugoslav Republic of Macedonia and Turkey through participation in Cedefop's activities. Support provided over the period has focussed on increasing cooperation between EU countries and those preparing to join. They have included integration into the reporting procedures of the EU VET policy framework, participation in Cedefop activities and networks by the time of accession (e.g. ReferNet, Skillsnet and TTnet), support for research cooperation, participation in the study visits programme, 	

CONSOLIDATED OBJECTIVE 2	Cedefop ACTIVITY AREA	HEADLINE ACTIVITIES	EVIDENCE BASED SOURCES
		<p>exchanges of information, knowledge management and dissemination.</p> <p><i>For the purposes of this section of the report we have added Virtual Communities under this Consolidated Objective, seeing them as tools for enhanced cooperation:</i></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <i>• Cedefop has been providing the Virtual Communities (VCs) since January 2003, with 21 VCs in operation by January 2006. The VCs are used: as a tool to support the work of the Technical Working Groups, Clusters and Peer Learning Activities; to promote the exchange on VET related issues at a European level; and to support research and developments. The communities deliver a number of tools to facilitate sharing of information and communication such as publishing and distributing documents, sharing bookmarks, engaging in discussion, on-line chat, conducting opinion polls, or sending group e-mails</i> 	

As can be seen in column three of Table 7.8 there is a variety of headline activities at Cedefop that fall under this heading. What we have focussed on here, through the medium of an in-depth case study, is the Study Visits programme but we have also added some observations both on those aspects of ReferNet that deal specifically with networking and, since we have some data from interviews and background material, we also offer some comments on Virtual Communities. Much of the rest of the activity set out in column three was not subject to detailed study but we believe listing it offers the opportunity to see the objective in the round and to give context for those things we can say something about.

Collectively the activities under this Consolidated Objective comprise an important component of the overall Cedefop portfolio and are especially interesting and important from an evaluation point of view as they bring the organisation into direct contact with both practitioners and the general public in ways not covered in the same way – or at all – by other sets of activities. Most recently, the Medium Term Priorities for 2006-08 have re-emphasised the importance of Cedefop's activities in relation to enhanced cooperation, stating: *'These medium-term priorities underline the need for an integrated approach and for enhanced cooperation with all stakeholders'*.

As a stand-alone Activity Area (C) we can see from Chapter 6 that this activity accounted, along with Area A for Research, for the smallest discrete share of the overall budget between 2002 and 2006 at an average of around €1.4 million and an FTE allocation of around 14. But we can also see from Figure 6.3 a steady year-on-year rise. What shall be looking at here is whether or not Cedefop has been successful in maximising the impact of its cooperation and exchange activities across an increasingly diverse and geographically extensive customer community.

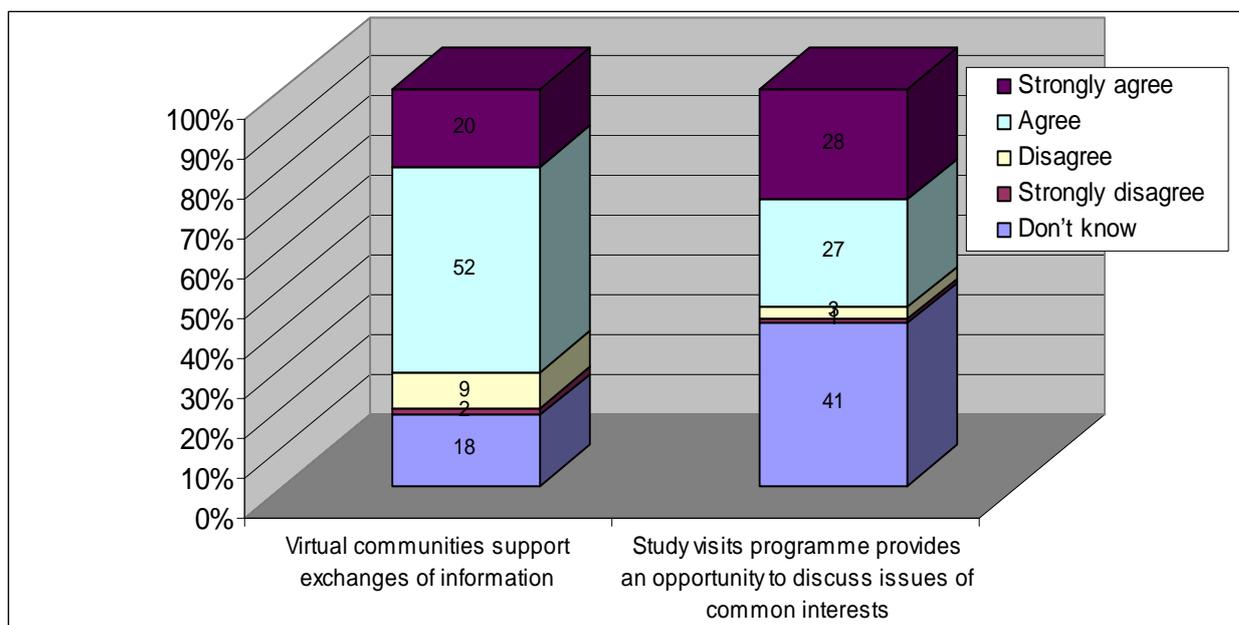
7.3.2 Customers' views on exchange and cooperation – survey evidence

We begin with evidence retrieved from the user and IB web surveys. In general, these show that external views of Cedefop's exchange and cooperation activities are extremely positive. For example, 69% users and 73% of IB survey respondents indicated that Cedefop activities had contributed 'to a great extent' to 'improved flow of VET information and the exchange of experience and good practice'. It is with regard to this specific objective that IB respondents consider Cedefop's contribution as most important. The most positive feedback comes from the NLOs/TSAs group of IBs (83% of whom believe Cedefop to be contributing to this 'to a great extent'). Clearly we cannot separate out the two elements from this objective (i.e. information from exchange of experience) so it is helpful that further insight is available from the case study we shall explore later.

More specifically focussing on *promoting cooperation and exchange of best practice*, 70% of intermediary bodies responded that they believed the objective was being achieved 'to a great extent' and a further 22% 'to a small extent', making this Cedefop's second most successful objective in the eyes of these bodies. The wider community of users seemed to be rather less aware of what was involved in this activity since 16% did not know how to answer this question (compared to only 2% of intermediaries). Nonetheless, 46% believed that Cedefop had been successful 'to a great extent' and 30% 'to a small extent'.

Figure 7.4, showing more directed responses from the user web survey, enables us to get a general "take" on items we shall discuss later in the section. It illustrates that 72% of user respondents "agree" or "strongly agree" that the Virtual Communities *support exchanges of information*. By comparison, however, the question about the study visits programme appears to be dominated by the "don't know" response. Out of the 593 respondents to the user survey, 423 chose to respond to questions about the study visits programme. Among those responding 41% did not know enough about the programme to offer an answer while 55% strongly agreed or agreed that the Study Visits *provided an opportunity to exchange information and discuss issues of common interest*. Perhaps this is not so surprising, however, in that it would have been necessary for a respondent to have participated in a study visit to be able to offer a legitimate view.

Figure 7.4 User's views on the value of specific products and services



Source: ECOTEC Research & Consulting, 2007 (survey among users of Cedefop's products and services)

In the "write-in" comments a number of survey respondents and interviewees indicated that the transfer of best practice is an area of interest to them and that they would like the exchange of best practice to be *further strengthened*. There was great enthusiasm among the respondent to offer advice on how things might be made even better and we set them out below:

- *"More handbooks, tools, concrete methods are needed"*.
- *"Extended dissemination of good practice information in appealing formats"*.
- *"I would expect more analysis of Leonardo da Vinci projects - some best practice examples"*.
- *"More information about good practices in commerce (elderly workers, half time training and working, training for specific groups)"*.
- *"Regarding the promotion of co-operation, exchanges and transfer of best practice there could be paid more attention (sic) to the international conferences and meetings between the researchers and policy makers of the European countries for the exchange of experiences and research findings"*.
- *"Promoting co-operation, exchanges and transfer of best practice should be modified in order to make it easier for people that want to join any cooperation program or opening for partners to find information of who to call"*.
- *"When submitting the project proposals the co-ordinators should use the data-base to avoid overlapping previous projects. The data base could also be used in the selection"*

of projects to check to what extent the project is actually innovative or 'reinventing the wheel'"

7.3.3 Customers' views on networking – survey evidence

In general, IBs show good levels of satisfaction with Cedefop networking activity. 52% of IB web survey respondents believed that the quality of Cedefop networks (both 'real' and 'virtual') compared favourably with similar networks and another 39% believed the quality of Cedefop networks was about the same as that of similar networks. The IB survey also showed that 77% of respondents considered the quality of support they received from Cedefop to be 'moderate to high' or 'very high'. The most positive ratings in this respect came from the Study Visit NLOs/TSAs (89% of them rated the support they received as 'moderate to high' or 'very high'), while the lowest ratings ('moderate to low') came from the TTNNet Members.

Responding to the question on how IBs would rate their cooperation with Cedefop, 80% of IB respondents rated it 'moderate to high' or 'very high'. In particular, all NLOs/TSAs that responded to this question rated their cooperation with Cedefop as either 'moderate to high' or 'very high'. The national ReferNet consortia interviewed in the context of the ReferNet case study also appeared to be satisfied with the support provided by Cedefop, stating among other positive comments that *"the guidelines for the detailed thematic report are discussed with the ReferNet members prior to its delivery"* and that *"the feedback from Cedefop colleagues is timely and constructive"*. Nevertheless, Refernet consortia sometimes found the timing and selection of themes *"disjointed or not aligned with other reporting activities of Cedefop, the Commission and other international organisations"* (ReferNet annual report 2005-2006, from national consortium), sometimes leading to duplicated work.

IB respondents were broadly happy with Cedefop's responsiveness: when answering the question 'to what extent does Cedefop respond to requests in a timely and satisfactory manner?' 69% of them responded 'to a great extent'. The most positive ratings again came from the NLOs/TSAs (94% responded 'to a great extent'). Eighty five per cent of IB respondents also considered that the delegation of tasks to Cedefop allowed for 'the functioning of comprehensive networks for the gathering and exchange of information and best practices'. The most positive ratings come from the TTNNet Members (93% 'agreed') and NLOs/TSAs (89% 'agreed'). There could hardly be a more satisfactory body of evidence for the effectiveness of Cedefop in relation to exchange and cooperation with its external user community.

7.3.4 Study Visits – a device for exchange and cooperation

7.3.4.1 *The basis of the study visits programme*

The Leonardo da Vinci (LDV) Study Visits are short term (3-5 working days) visits for small groups (10-15 people). They are made up of practitioners, decision makers and experts and the aim is to visit a second country to explore, learn about, exchange views on and discuss a specific VET-related topic and/or European and national priorities. The study visits offer an opportunity for exchanges on innovative ideas and practices and for professional contacts that might potentially be used for developing new projects and creating networks in the future. Over the past 20 years, nearly 11,400 vocational training specialists have taken part in the LDV study visits.

Cedefop's role in the LDV study visits has been to support their implementation by coordinating the selection of topics; compiling the catalogues of visits on offer; ensuring the relevance and quality of the content; supporting the National Liaison Officers and Technical Support Agents who were responsible for organising the visits in each country; paying participants' grants and finally evaluating and valorising outcomes. From 2008-2013, Cedefop will coordinate the consolidated study visits for education and vocational training specialists and policy-makers on behalf of the Commission. This is a merged programme of the previous Arion higher education visits and Cedefop's LDV visits. Cedefop sees this development of its role as being a recognition of the solid methodology they have developed to support the organisation of the LDV study visits over the past 20 years.

7.3.4.2 *User perspectives on study visits*

Respondents to the web survey of users who had experience of them declared themselves generally satisfied with the experience. What the "write in" comments also indicated was that they wanted more valorisation of the benefits they gained. Some were looking for follow-up visits so that topics could be explored in more depth. Others thought that wider dissemination of the information gathered on specific visits would be of interest to similar initiatives throughout Europe and could be better used to inform other subsequent study visits. Once again, the pattern is of overall satisfaction but with an enthusiasm to improve the model and extend it.

The NLOs and TSAs interviewed from both new and older member states also gave very positive feedback on Cedefop's management of the study visits. What they added was a suggestion to keep the merged programme of visits as simple as possible, 'just as it is now' and not to introduce any additional administrative requirements. NLOs also

commended the participatory approach with Cedefop consulting with them over the design of the annual themes for the visits, about national issues and what topics would be of interest in the catalogue. There was also positive feedback on the question of Cedefop's role in quality control.

Among the more complimentary comments for the NLOs and TSAs were the following:

- *"The Study visits are very well prepared and the themes are announced in advance which is not the case for other exchange programmes.(NLO from New MS)"*
- *"I feel fully consulted and my views are integrated in the design of the study visits. (NLO from New MS)"*
- *"[We receive] Very positive feedback by Swedish study visit participants. The content of study visits is tailored to Swedish needs whilst at the same time responding to EU policy priorities, Cedefop ensures that EU policy priorities are integrated"*

Part of the success attributed to Cedefop's role in the study visits seems to come from its use of the OLIVE database. Being interactive and live online, it is a significant electronic support system aiding efficient management and is considered to be a sound platform for the merged study visits and Arion visits for the future.

From a less rosy hued perspective, comments from some users took the view that it is currently not easy for the wider public to understand the value of the work of the study visits through the website, which is the primary point of access. It appears that most of the information appears to be accessible to 'member's only' while the website 'doors' are mostly closed to outsiders. This may also go some way to explaining the "don't know" count – where many who have no "membership" experience found themselves unable to take a view on the study visits programme.

7.3.4.3 *Output, cost and efficiency*

It is clear from Table 7.9 how much of the overall budget for the delivery of this Consolidated Objective is dedicated to servicing the operational costs of the study visits programme. For example in 2006 it accounted for 88% of the allocation. Consistent with a theme that has been building up throughout the report, Table 7.9 also shows that nominal funding has been virtually static (perhaps even declining in real terms) for what the overwhelming body of users declared to be a highly valued component of the Cedefop portfolio.

Table 7.9 Budgeted Expenditure for the Study Visits Programme (Non-Staff Costs)

YEAR	2001	2002	2003	2004	2005	2006
Budget for the Study Visits Programme	not indicated	€ 1,161,000	€ 1,055,000	€ 1,105,000	€ 1,275,000	€ 1,248,000

Source: Annual reports 2001, 2002, 2003, 2004, 2005, 2006

Again consistent with what we have reported elsewhere, Table 7.10 shows that despite flat (at best) funding, all the output indicators point sharply upwards (outside the difficult year of 2004). There can be little doubt on the basis of these data that *efficiency* is a hallmark of the programme.

Table 7.10 Study visits outputs 2001-2006

YEAR	2001	2002	2003	2004	2005	2006
Participants in the study visits programme	650	722	737	730	762	842
... of which participants from the New Member States				119	146	187
Number of study visits carried out	65	64	68	62	66	68
Number of countries hosting study visits	22	22	26	27	26	29

Source: Annual reports 2001, 2002, 2003, 2004, 2005, 2006
Cedefop publication: 'LDVII Study Visits programme in 2006, facts, experiences, impressions'

7.3.4.4 The composition of participants

A feature that sits behind the broad data is that the number of participants from the New Member States has been increasing steadily from 16% of the total in 2004 to 22% in 2006, and accounting for half of the increase between 2005 and 2006. This is a clear endorsement of the value of the programme from a group of nations who repeatedly register their high need for exchanging good practice and look to other Member States to help them develop their VET policy and practice. There are issues over the shares of places allocated to the New Member States (for example, 10 places available for Estonia, 5 places for Bulgaria) but the decision process, as part of the overall Lifelong Learning Programme, is outside Cedefop's control.

To assess the results for itself, Cedefop carried out an analysis of the reports completed both by study visits groups and by individual participants for the years 2005 and 2006. It found, consistent with our own results, that participants were generally very positive: for the year 2006, 38% of participants were fully satisfied, 45% satisfied and 16% fairly satisfied. Participants found the study visits to have been relevant both to the announced themes and to the participants' professional interests⁵⁴. Some other interesting features from the study are worthy of note. In terms of the provenance of participants, 34% of all participants in 2005 and 32% in 2006 represented the social partners or were nominated by them. These included representatives of trade unions and employers' organisations, chambers of commerce, training institutes managed by social partners, and private enterprises. However, participants from 'civil service bodies involved in VET' dominated the composition of study visit groups accounting for 33%-35% of all participants in the 2004-2006 period. The remainder were practitioners (i.e. persons employed by VET institutes, in the non-school VET system, universities, NGOs, publicly funded associations, agencies managing EU programmes etc), while 2% of 2006 participants were researchers from research institutes⁵⁵.

7.3.4.5 *Study visits supporting mutual learning and peer review*

As the EU VET policy framework has been developing, the Maastricht Communiqué invited 'the use of the LDV study visits to support mutual learning and peer review'. As a result, three Peer Learning Study Visits and a peer learning seminar were organised in 2006. These four events represented a conscious effort to influence VET policy since participants included individuals nominated by DGVTs from 20 countries and other individuals involved in DGEAC's working groups relevant to the themes covered. In order to increase the policy impact of these Peer Learning Study Visits, a synthesis paper was requested for each of the three Peer Learning Study Visits to capture the discussions and conclusions⁵⁶.

⁵⁴ Cedefop Publications: 'LDVII Study Visits programme in 2006, facts, experiences, impressions' and Cedefop 2006 Activity Report

⁵⁵ Source: Table 3 from the publication 'LDVII Study Visits programme in 2006, facts, experiences, impressions.

⁵⁶ Unfortunately, however, for our attempt to measure impact, there appears to have been no follow-up process to explore the potential policy outcomes that may have resulted. The normal study visit practice of sending out "added value" questionnaires does not seem to have been followed "due to the ad hoc nature" of the three peer learning visits.

7.3.4.6 *Measuring impact*

As we have stated throughout this report the measurement of impact for an organisation like Cedefop is more a matter of estimating indirect effects than of making objective judgements. What we can see from the above is that, while numbers are necessarily small, the effects of the study visits programme on individuals, mobility, knowledge and networking possibilities can reasonably be judged as being significant. Most of the real value of what will come from spending a little over a million Euros a year on study visits will be intangible. The Cedefop publication '*LdVII Study Visits Programme in 2006: facts, experiences, impressions*' suggests that - based on the analysis of questionnaires sent to individual participants within a year of their study visits, 96% of participants stated that they acquired new knowledge while 87% of them established new contacts. 94% of them were not passive listeners and contributed by sharing their own knowledge during the visit. In terms of sharing their experience after their return from the study visit, 58% of participants in the study stated that they shared knowledge and experience from their study visit through a presentation, lecture or talk, and 39% wrote a report on the visit or circulated the end of visit report to colleagues. The individuals undoubtedly valued the experience and it enhanced their professional lives and opened them up to the wider community of interest and to new learning. In terms of impact this appears to us to be a satisfactory outcome.

However, there was some suggestion from our interviews that an opportunity is being missed for Cedefop to use them more effectively as a *strategic resource to inform other activities within the agency* and to involve other staff. The normal inter-area cooperation around the study visits tends to be restricted to experts from other areas preparing background notes on study visit themes or participating in those study visits of particular relevance to their work. There seems to be room here for some channel to be established systematically to capture and transfer the knowledge from the Study Visits to other Cedefop activities.

7.3.5 Virtual Communities

7.3.5.1 *The basis of Virtual Communities*

One other area where we are able to offer a view within the sphere of *exchange and cooperation* is in the case of Virtual Communities (VC) as tools for enhanced cooperation. As described in the Annex to Cedefop's 2nd Activity Report 2006, Cedefop has been providing this activity since January 2003 and there were 21 VCs in operation by January 2006. VCs are used in a number of ways: to support the work of the Technical Working Groups, Clusters and Peer Learning Activities; to promote the exchange on VET related

issues at a European level; and to support research and developments. The communities are designed to facilitate sharing of information and communication such as publishing and distributing documents, sharing bookmarks, engaging in discussion, on-line chat, conducting opinion polls, or sending group e-mails. A Cedefop review conducted in 2006 indicated that, in terms of the *type of content* exchanged, community members tended to give priority to the circulation of policy documents, reports, articles, newsletters and engaged less in discussions, exchange of ideas, informal comments and considerations or other forms of sharing of know-how. However, in some communities it was discovered that progressively more and more discussions were taking place (i.e. NFL, KS-LLL, Guidance and Europass).

In January 2006, a decision was taken to carry out a thematic restructuring of the Virtual Communities and to internalise their animation. Following this, the ECVET and EQF VCs were merged, while the 'eSkills Forum' was merged with the 'CEN/ISSS workshop on ICT skills'. Seven VCs were closed down⁵⁷. At the end of 2006, there were 14 Virtual Communities in operation, with some 5000 unique members (it is noted that members often participate in more than one of the communities). Eight current VCs are related to "Policy Development", including those on: Europass Implementation, Non-formal and Informal Learning, Quality Assurance in VET, Training of Trainers Network, Leonardo da Vinci Forum, Lifelong Guidance, Sectoral Approaches to LLL, Credit Transfer in VET – European Qualifications Framework, EU Knowledge System for Lifelong Learning.

7.3.5.2 *Outputs and user perspectives*

Since they are by design "virtual", it is more than ever difficult to find hard information against which to assess the effectiveness and impact of the VCs. The previous paragraph gives some hint of their (entirely to be expected) dispersion across the activities of Cedefop. We can, from Table 7.11, give some measure of ephemeral and registered membership from data recovered from Cedefop sources before the advent of the 2006 restructuring. The first point to make from this is the scale of the interactions in 2004 and 2005. This tells us something about the "reach" of the VC model. Trends are less easy to read from such a short series but we can see that, while ephemeral links grew substantially 2003-2005, registered membership first grew and then fell back slightly.

⁵⁷ Single Framework on Transparency of Qualifications and Competencies, Young researchers in VET, European eLearning Quality Forum, eLearning a European observation system, Forum for social aspects of eLearning, eLearning Industry Group, ACVT and the Copenhagen process

Table 7.11 Outputs related to Virtual Communities, 2001-2006

YEAR	2001	2002	2003	2004	2005	2006
Total number of one-time (unique) members for the virtual communities (VCs)			2,068	5,102	6,588	
Total number of registered members in the VCs			3,855	8,034	7,553	

Source: Reports of the Court of Auditors on the annual accounts of the European Centre for the Development of Vocational Training for the financial years 2003, 2004, 2005

The findings of our own study's own web surveys offer another window on effectiveness. We have already seen in Figure 7.4 that 72% of user respondents "agree" or "strongly agree" that the Virtual Communities support exchanges of information". We can also report that special mention was made by several TTNNet members of how valuable they find exchanges in the TTNNet Virtual Community. Some respondents did, however, offer some useful observations that might be of value to Cedefop in its restructuring process:

- *"Cedefop focuses too much on setting up the Virtual Community but not much on the animation of the Communities";*
- *"Virtual communities only work if you organise some 'real life' network activities on the side, so that people get a chance to meet in person. This will boost their participation in the online network activities";*

Other external (Commission) interviewees added their voice to these observations - stressing that the virtual communities are an interesting way to gather information but *"the real issue is what is done with the information gathered"*. The observation was also offered that; *"if a virtual community is considered 'too open', policy makers will not discuss certain issues there"*. From another user perspective (National Europass Centres) issues that are common to virtual communities more generally raised their head; *"just extra effort"; "only useful when there is a specific question to ask"; "difficult to identify new contributions and a long time to scan through all the inputs to find the new ones"*. Virtual communities, in general, seem to face the issue of variable participation; variable (and sometimes unreasonable) user expectations; a tendency for exchanges to "tail off" and so on. An agreed position across the generality of the responses was the critical role that needs to be played by an *animator* if the inevitable frustrations of the virtual community are not to destroy the value that it can bring.

7.3.5.3 *Effectiveness and impact*

As part of the objective for *cooperation and exchange of best practice* the Virtual Communities initiative seems to play a somewhat ambiguous role. On the one hand it offers an important dimension of "reach" and connectivity to a geographically and culturally dispersed VET community from a base in Thessaloniki – using the best of the features of the Information Society. On the other hand, by the very nature of its openness and uncontrollability it is very hard to marshal it closely to the aims that its sponsors might have for it. It is also a difficult activity to cost and even more to discover what real outputs it might be producing. As we have shown, users generally find it to be a valuable instrument for exchange and cooperation activity but, as we have also indicated, when it comes to specifics there is a hint of frustrated expectations. By comparison with what we found in relation to the study visits the contrast could hardly be more marked. For the study visits there was almost unequivocal praise from those able to participate but an inevitable issue about the cost limits on participation. For the Virtual Communities real added value was less widely brought out but this time the issue seemed to be the very universality of participation and the uncontrollability that it introduced. One axiom of evaluation (though a contested one) is that "if you cannot measure what you get from an action, don't do it". Whether or not this is the principle to be followed in this case, we must say that from our perspective, trying to gauge the effectiveness and impact for Virtual Communities has proved to be a measurement challenge too far.

7.3.6 Summary

Taking a general view of the activities involved in delivering *exchange and cooperation* (some of which we have closely examined and some we have not) there has been a record of *effective performance*. Cedefop's exchange activities are clearly seen by the users we have canvassed as an important area of success in delivering its overall mission. The study visits programme in particular offers strong evidence of being successfully run over many years and the award to Cedefop of the combined Arion and LDV visits from 2008 is an endorsement of this. The extension of the programme to participants from the New Member States - with high participation rates during the first 12 months of EU enlargement - is also a measure of how well-perceived the programme is. If there is an issue to be examined here, it is to do with funding and the principles for participation, which are largely outside Cedefop's control. With respect to Virtual Communities we have found it much more difficult to come to a view. Using new technologies to maintain dialogue across a widely dispersed and thematically segmented user group has been an appropriately ambitious project for Cedefop but, as we have said, its real benefits are difficult to measure. Looking forward, what we were able to identify from the Study Visits

case study was that there was a considerable desire among users in the wider community for a coherent system for the communication of good/best practice consistent with the underlying principles of Lisbon and the Open Method of Coordination. Cedefop's customers will continue to look to it to provide a leadership role in this.

7.4 Consolidated Objective Three: Research, Advice and Policy Support

7.4.1 Mapping the Components of Consolidated Objective Three

As we did for the previous two parts of this chapter, Table 7.12 sets out the structure of the material we shall be looking at as we explore activities under the Consolidated Objective for *research, advice and policy support*. Column one shows the objectives from the Intervention Logic that underpin this area of work. There are the two Operational Objectives (*carrying out research on European VET systems* and *providing technical and scientific advice*) together with the Specific Objective of *supporting the implementation of EU VET priorities*. Column two matches these objectives with the relevant Cedefop Activity Areas and column three is again a description provided to us at our request by Cedefop of the headline activities that it sees as sitting under this Consolidated Objective. As in previous sections, Column four sets out the sources of evidence for the study that are used in making judgments about how effective Cedefop has been and some estimation of impact.

Table 7.12 The Components of Consolidated Objective Three - Research, Advice and Policy Support

CONSOLIDATED OBJECTIVE 3	Cedefop ACTIVITY AREA	HEADLINE ACTIVITIES	EVIDENCE BASED SOURCES
<p>OO1</p> <p>Carrying out research on European VET Systems;</p> <p>OO4</p> <p>Providing technical and scientific advice</p> <p>SO2</p> <p>Supporting the implementation of EU VET priorities</p>	<p>Area 'A' Developing Research;</p> <p>Area 'B' Reporting and facilitating a concerted approach</p>	<p>Effective VET policies rely on understanding the social and economic trends that change individual and labour market needs. Cedefop's research provides insight into these trends and assesses their policy implications. Cedefop analyses how Member States tackle the challenges these trends pose for VET, raising awareness of the policy options chosen and the reasons why. By bringing new knowledge through research and analysing policy developments, Cedefop provides evidence to support VET policy-makers. The transfer of research evidence and policy results is encouraged through Cedefop's networks and contacts which strengthen cooperation between researchers and policy-makers.</p> <p>Cedefop also provides high-level technical support and expertise to the EU and Member States to examine topics related to the Copenhagen process and VET aspects of the Education and training 2010 work programme: recognition of learning outcomes, quality assurance in VET, lifelong guidance, teachers and trainers in VET, European qualification framework and European credit system for VET. In two latter areas, the European Commission and Member States have gone further and are developing European approaches or tools to improve VET.</p> <p>Selected activities, representative of Cedefop's work in European VET research and to support the implementation of EU VET priorities are:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • <i>Policy analysis and reporting:</i> Through its policy reports, Cedefop reviews and analyses Member States' policy progress to support the European Commission, Member States and social partners in their decisions on future VET policy. The reports discuss policy progress in light of research evidence. Between 2000 and 2006 Cedefop published four policy reports. The first two analysed the development of an EU VET policy framework. The later two analysed specifically follow-up of the Copenhagen process, in 2004 (1st review in Maastricht) and 2006 (2nd review in Helsinki). • <i>European qualifications framework (EQF):</i> Cedefop was actively involved in developing 	<p>Web Survey</p> <p>IB Survey</p> <p>Interviews</p> <p>Documentation Review</p> <p>Skillsnet Case Study</p> <p>Policy reporting for the Copenhagen Process - Helsinki Case Study</p> <p>European Tools, the example of Europass</p>

CONSOLIDATED OBJECTIVE 3	Cedefop ACTIVITY AREA	HEADLINE ACTIVITIES	EVIDENCE BASED SOURCES
		<p>the EQF and is playing an important role in discussions on its establishment. Cedefop made a substantial contribution to the analysis and follow-up of the EQF consultation process. Based on this, the European Commission submitted a recommendation to establish an EQF to the European Parliament and the (Education) Council. Cedefop's work on reference levels for vocational education and training on learning outcomes provided the basis for this qualification framework.</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • <i>Europass</i> is a tangible example of Cedefop's work contributing directly to helping citizens and supporting policy developments. Cedefop has developed and maintains the Europass web resources in close cooperation with DG EAC and supports the network of National Europass Centres (NECs). Cedefop's role in particular involves monitoring the use of templates through statistics on the use of the Europass portal. Cedefop has been instrumental in designing two of the five Europass instruments: the Curriculum Vitae and the Certificate Supplement. Cedefop has also hosted the Europass portal (www.europass.cedefop.europa.eu). Since its launch in February 2005, over eight million visits have been recorded, two million CVs completed online and eight million documents downloaded. • <i>Skillsnet</i> examines changes in sectors, occupations and enterprises to identify and anticipate new, emerging and changing skill needs. It is a project aiming to respond to policy. It also strives to provide more and better quality information to understand skill supply and demand at European level: (a) it develops a common approach to regular skill needs forecasting; (b) it carries out a European skill supply forecast together with an indication of possible imbalances between skill supply and demand in coming years; and (c) it explores a common European approach to enterprise surveys on skill and training needs. • <i>Research reports</i>: Cedefop has published three research reports since 1998 and will publish a fourth in 2009. They provide a regular comprehensive review of current 	

CONSOLIDATED OBJECTIVE 3	Cedefop ACTIVITY AREA	HEADLINE ACTIVITIES	EVIDENCE BASED SOURCES
		<p>socio-economic research related and relevant to vocational education and training and skill development. Cedefop's research reports summarise and evaluate research results, indicate their implications for policy and improve the transparency of VET-relevant research in Europe. Increasingly, Cedefop has aimed to use its reports to provide research evidence as a basis for policy decisions. For example, the fourth report has brought together research experts to examine the VET policy priorities agreed by the European Commission, Member States and European social partners in the Copenhagen process.</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • The <i>European journal of vocational training</i> is a resource for European VET research, policy and practice. It is unique in its European perspective and is published in five languages (Spanish, German, English, French and Portuguese) three times a year. The ambition of the journal is to contribute to the debate and discussion on vocational training in Europe by publishing quality articles on research, practices, policies and innovation in this field. 	

As we have noted many times throughout this report, the period 2001-2006 has seen a significant shift in the external action environment for Cedefop and, as we shall show in this section, this has had a major impact in the organisation's research and policy analysis activities. Research has been a core function for Cedefop since its very beginning and this has continued throughout the evaluation period. In contrast, the organisation's policy analysis function has – perhaps inevitably – had a more varied track record over the lifetime of the organisation but in the last few years it has been the location for developments which are proving to be of great significance both operationally and strategically, culminating in the forging of closer links between both the policy analysis and research functions.

Out of the wide scope of Cedefop's activities under this consolidated objective as they are described in column three of the table we have had to make some choices both about where to focus our research effort and where, having done so, we can and cannot fairly come to judgments about effectiveness and impact. In early consultation with the Steering Committee for the study we selected two case studies for in-depth investigation – Skillsnet

and policy related work under the Copenhagen Process. What we have not been able to do, however, is to give the same order of attention to those tools such as Europass, EQF and ECVET and to other elements within the list of Cedefop activities. The issue for these cases is whether or not we are in a position to make the same sorts of evaluative judgements as for the more intensive analyses. Clearly not. But we shall, within the limits of our evidence, offer observations on these areas where we feel that they have a positive contribution to make.

7.4.2 The basis for Cedefop's involvement in research and policy analysis

The basis for Cedefop's involvement in research and policy analysis stems from Article 2 of Cedefop's Founding Regulation which states that one of its main tasks is 'to contribute to developing and coordinating research'. In terms of what the organisation understands by 'research', the Medium Term Priorities (MTPs) for 2006-08 state that it is *'the systematic cross-disciplinary enquiry into the systems, conditions and frameworks for the structures and processes involved in acquiring and updating vocational skills and knowledge. Theory, methodology and analyses combine to reduce complexity, provide explanation and improve understanding'*. Cedefop's objective in this area is to *'explain developments in vocational education and training, to identify new issues and demands, explore their implications for innovation and development, and to increase the transparency of systems and processes associated with learning'*. The means to achieve this at its disposal are in-house enquiry, the commissioning of studies and participating in research cooperation networks.

Identifying the implications for *policy* is at the heart of what Cedefop does and indeed can flow from almost all of its activities. The MTP describes Cedefop's aims in this area as follows:

'to bring diverse sources of knowledge together into a coherent structure and develop up-to-date comparative elements highlighting policy implications on a range of key issues in order to lay the foundations of a broad-based platform of shared knowledge and experience. This is intended to promote debate and to enable policy-makers to relate and benchmark their activities better within the European context as well as to support policy-makers in reaching well-founded decisions on future actions. This approach is consciously based on the provisions of Article 150 of the Treaty' (p. 24)

The activities that Cedefop brings to bear to deliver this objective include: describing Member States' VET systems; analysis of and reporting on specific VET issues and trends on a transnational basis, and providing updates on a range of topical priority VET policy developments. Facilitating a concerted approach to VET involves networking and

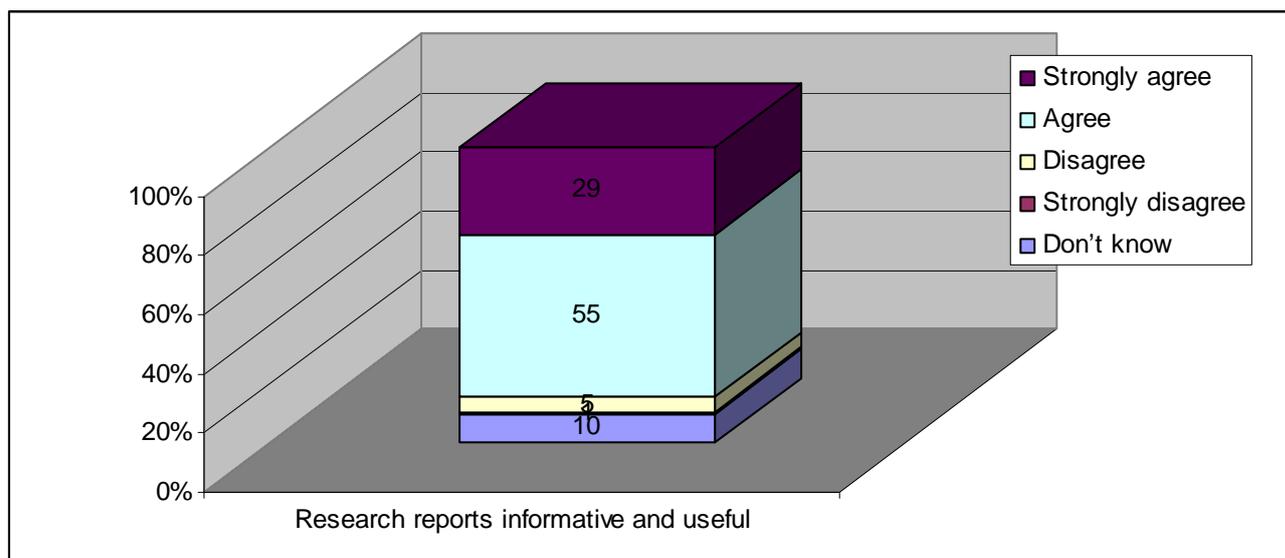
investigations to inform reflection, foster cooperation and promote a common understanding of key VET concepts. Both the reporting and concerted approach activities draw on information provided by research, policy, practice and statistics from throughout Europe.

Cedefop clearly envisages a close link between its research and policy analysis functions. Significantly, the MTP states that *'all activities seek to clarify the implications of research results for VET policy and practice'* (p. 19). This is reinforced in one of the five MTPs which is *'to address Cedefop's role of promoting and developing VET by providing relevant and comparable information and analysis, capitalising on research findings and outlining the implications for policy and practice.'* (p. 8). It is also stated that Cedefop *'will continue to report on change and innovation in VET research, paying particular attention to the implications for policy and practice. The next research report will focus on the Maastricht priorities and will also address new and longer-term research topics'* (p. 13)

7.4.3 Customer views on research, advice and policy support, – survey evidence

What are the views of Cedefop's research customers? Views of research activities are generally positive. Just more than half of users (55%) agree that the research reports are informative and useful and almost 30% strongly agree. To add further weight to this conclusion, only 5% dissent from this view. This appears to be something working universally well for the wider user community.

Figure 7.5 The value of specific products and services



Source: ECOTEC Research & Consulting, 2007 (survey among users of Cedefop's products and services)

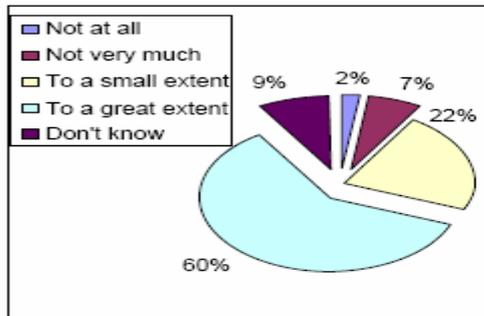
We refer again to Figures 4.12 and 4.13 presented in Chapter 4 earlier, which showed that ‘offering *scientific advice and support on specific technical or scientific issues* is not so clearly seen as a strong suit for the organisation in the eyes of its users. The pattern is repeated in the IB Survey with a much wider range of opinions expressed. This is the least highly scored of all the IB contributions in respect of meeting objectives. This issue was raised in the interviews and we assess that this could be explained by the low recognition/ visibility Cedefop gains for its activities related to offering technical and scientific advice and support. Examples include Cedefop’s role in supporting EU VET tools and instruments, such as the European CV hosted on the ETV website (part of Europass).

Retrieving the figures from Chapter 4 summarising user views on the *specific objective* of supporting policy development, Figure ‘4.14’ below shows users in the wider community are *much less clear* about Cedefop in this role – for example only 46% of responses see Cedefop as meeting the "policy implementation" objective “to a great extent”.

When we come to the opinions of the intermediary bodies, however, the story is quite different, as was already discussed in Chapter 4. Only 9% record a “don’t know” and over 80 percent believe that Cedefop is making some sort of "policy implementation" impact with as many as 60% seeing this in the category “to a great extent”. Hence, it is clear from Figure ‘4.15’ below that the IB users have a much more positive view of Cedefop as a contributor to policy development and implementation. This is perhaps no more than would be expected since, while the IBs can be expected to have a role in and a view of

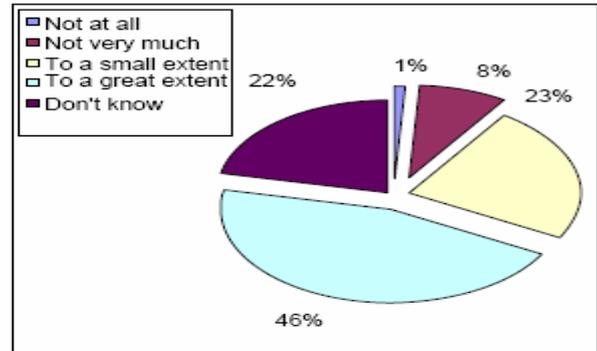
policy, direct users will have no necessary reason to see the value of the organisation through this lens.

Figure 4.14 Intermediary body perspectives on Cedefop's contribution to efficient and effective implementation of Community programmes and/or EU policy initiatives in the VET field



Source: ECOTEC Research & Consulting, 2007 (Intermediary Body survey)
 Note: Based on 45 responses (response rate to this question ~ 69.2%).

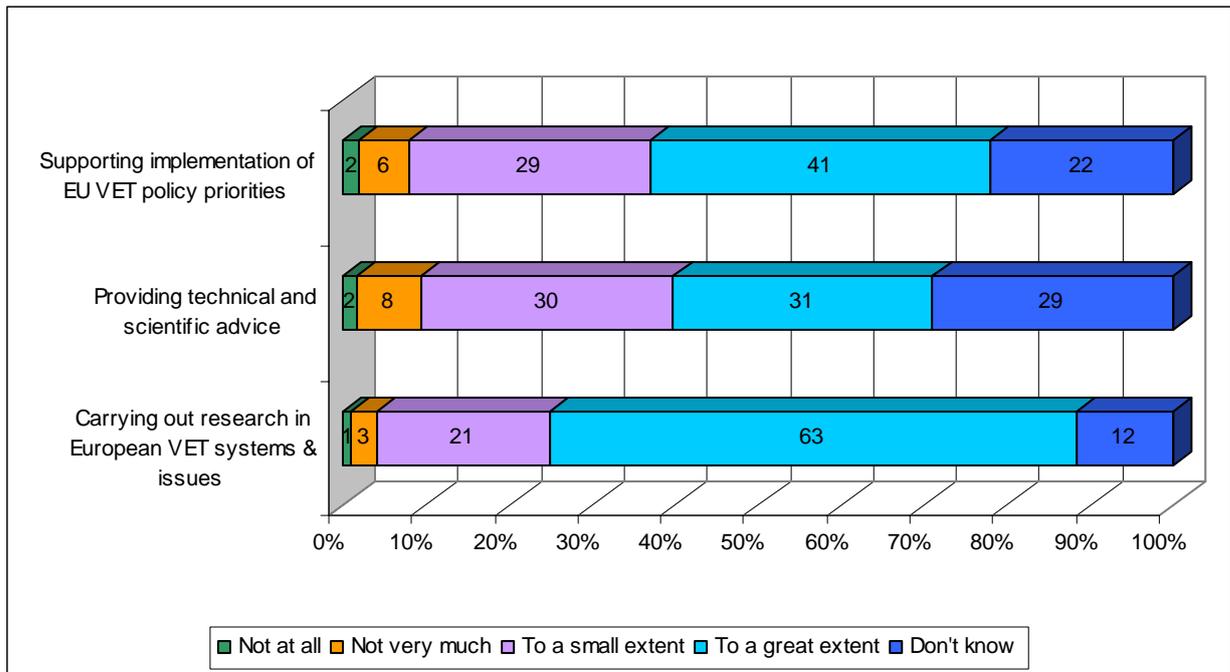
Figure 4.15 User perspectives on Cedefop's contribution to efficient and effective implementation of Community programmes and/or EU policy initiatives in the VET field



Source: ECOTEC Research & Consulting, 2007 (survey among users of Cedefop's products and services)
 Note: Based on 418 responses (response rate to this question 71%).

Figures 7.6 and 7.7 below present user views and then IB views on the two operational objectives and the specific objective making up consolidated objective 3.

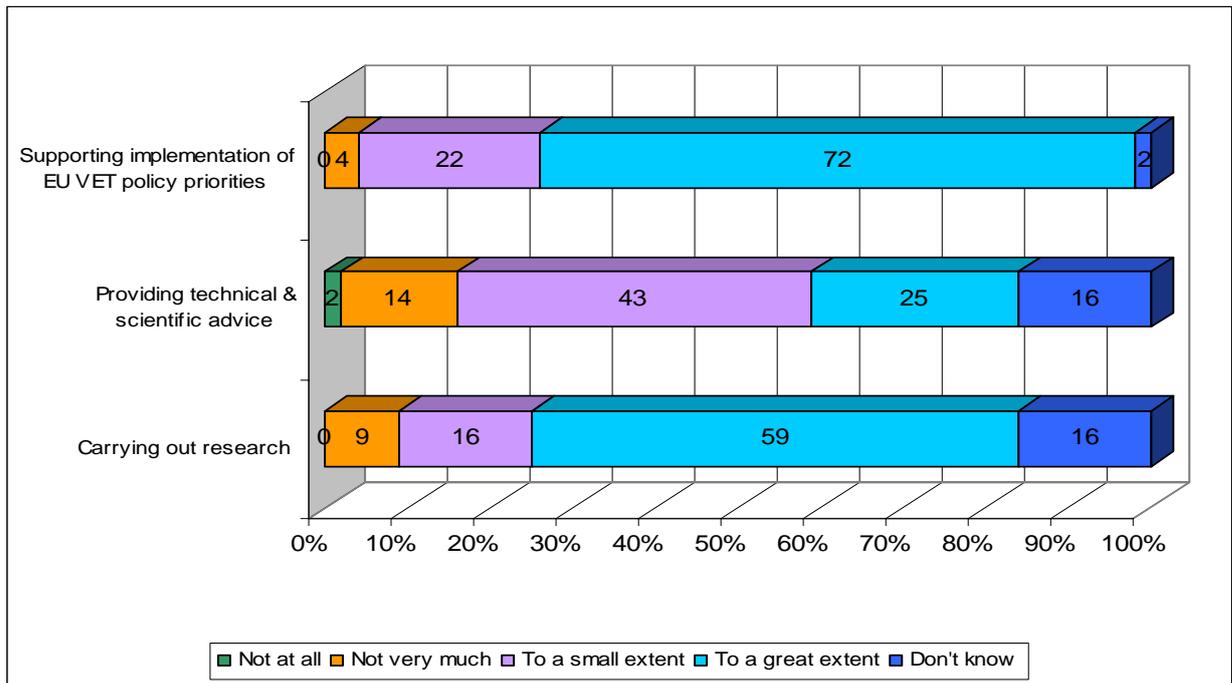
Figure 7.6 User Perspectives on the Success of Cedefop in Achieving Consolidated Objective 3



Source: ECOTEC Research & Consulting 2007 (survey among users of Cedefop's products and services)

What is obvious in this case is that Cedefop is most closely identified by its wider user population as being a valued source for carrying out research and for policy support. As we have already seen in Chapter 4, the wider user community is less attuned to Cedefop's operational objectives for providing technical and scientific advice and support.

Figure 7.7 Intermediary Bodies' Perspectives on the Success of Cedefop in Achieving its Consolidated Objective 3



Source: ECOTEC Research & Consulting 2007 (Intermediary Body survey)

As Figure 7.7 shows the intermediary bodies working with Cedefop believe it is most successful in supporting policy implementation and carrying out research.

7.4.4 Customer observations

Alongside the generally positive picture presented above the main issue highlighted in our 'softer' sources of evidence (such as text comments inserted in the web survey responses and interview feedback) was a concern that Cedefop could improve the effectiveness of its research and advisory activities if it were to produce more analytical and more focused outputs. The following quotations from a user and some DGVTs illustrate this well:

- *'Most of the work and studies carried out remain descriptive, not analytical'* (user in the web survey)

- *'Cedefop's approach to research is to undertake large studies with a long duration which makes it seem heavy and slow. Activities should be smaller and more targeted.'* (DGVT)
- *'The publications themselves could be better disseminated and they could be more focused. There could be fewer, better, publications'*(DGVT)
- *Whilst its research is valid, its publications are too lengthy and academic for ministerial use. Even the Executive Summaries are too long and too wordy - one recent example was 11 pages long.* (DGVT)

7.4.5 The Case of Skillsnet

Skillsnet is a network aiming to involve policy-makers, social partners, practitioners and researchers in discussions about research methods and outcomes around skills. The context for its work is a set of critical European policy drivers. The most prominent are the two key Communiqués that, as we saw in Chapter Two, have configured VET policy in the last half-decade. Maastricht called for 'more emphasis on the early identification of skills needs and planning of VET provision'. Helsinki stressed the need to adapt E&T systems to emerging skills needs; the need for training to be demand driven and the importance of anticipating skills needs and in particular the skills needs of SMEs. In a more general sense a key policy driver for Skillsnet is the Lisbon Strategy. Three of the Integrated Guidelines for Employment 2005-2008 are encouraging Member States to update systems for the anticipation of skill needs. The work of Skillsnet is also integrally linked to the European 'Social Partners' Framework of Actions for the Lifelong Learning Development of Competences and Qualifications' (2002) which states their dedication to push forward Europe-wide work to identify and forecast skill needs.

To respond to these policy requirements Skillsnet is designed to examine changes in sectors, occupations and enterprises in order to identify and anticipate new, emerging and changing skill needs. A further aim is to provide more and better quality information to understand skill supply and demand at European level. The structuring principles for Skillsnet are to: (a) develop a common approach to regular skill needs forecasting; (b) carry out a European skill supply forecast (with an indication of possible imbalances between skill supply and demand in coming years); and (c) explore a common European approach to enterprise surveys on skill and training needs. A significant focal point of current activities is the work to set up a pan-European skills forecasting model. A European system of skills needs forecasting does not yet exist since national forecasts use different methods and classifications and are generally not comparable.

In setting out on this ambitious work programme Skillsnet has so far focused its efforts on the demand side (i.e. the demand for certain occupations and/or certain skills/qualifications). The next stage of the work will focus on a model for supply forecasting to explore the supply side (education and training). The final stage of the work will be to compare the demand and supply sides to see where the mismatches are likely to occur. Another ongoing component of Skillsnet is the sectoral approach to skills. Tourism has been particularly prominent in this as a sector with very high levels of labour migration and its own emerging 'European labour market'.

Interviews with the Cedefop Skillsnet team presented their view that the overall feedback received so far from network members has been very positive and that the number of people taking part in each workshop activities "has always exceeded expectations". Feedback from network members also shows that the Skillsnet newsletter is popular. The view is that in the light of these responses there is "no need to develop a formal system to assess performance" and that "limited funding does not allow carrying out an impact evaluation of activities". The received view from the Cedefop Annual Report of 2005 is that *"the network is functioning effectively and is accepted both by researchers and policy-makers, including the Commission... New and challenging themes have been tackled and provide a clear value to the ongoing policies of the EU and the Member States"*.

7.4.6 Outputs, costs and efficiency

Table 7.13 provides an insight into the types of outputs being achieved by Skillsnet and their scale, and covers the period from January to October 2006. It highlights the thrust of activity towards facilitating dialogue between network members and in commissioning research to fill gaps in knowledge and understanding. Noteworthy are the 7 invitations that were received to present the work of Skillsnet at external meetings and conferences, and the increase in the number of network members.

Table 7.13 Skillsnet outputs

Activity	Outputs Jan-Nov 2006	Indicators
Workshops on specific fields of skill needs analysis.	<p>Expert workshop on European skill needs forecasting was organised in November with participation of 15 countries</p> <p>Workshop on future skill needs in agri-food and forestry-wood sectoral chains prepared and took place on 20-21 November. Contract on a background study concluded, interim report received.</p> <p>Preparation of a workshop on skill needs in biotechnology (call for tender for background study launched).</p>	<p>Number of copies sold/requested between Jan-Oct 2006:</p> <p>Early identification of skill needs in Europe (EN): 105 copies</p> <p>Identifying skill needs for the future (EN, DE, FR): 162 copies</p> <p>Two articles were prepared for other institutes (UNESCO-UNEVOC, IWAK)</p> <p>Presentations or information inputs were made in the following events/ conferences between Jan-Oct 2006:</p> <p>OECD Network B (indicators of education and labour market) meeting, Washington</p> <p>Monitoring of regional labour markets in Europe, Frankfurt</p>
Follow up a European approach for skill needs forecasting.	Contract on 'Medium-term forecast of occupational skill needs in Europe' has been concluded (additional activity). Results expected in summer 2007.	<p>Peer Review: Forecasting skills and labour market needs, Helsinki</p> <p>Monitoring regional labour markets in Europe, Brussels</p> <p>ETCG meeting, Brussels</p>
Publications of workshop proceedings.	<p>Study on skill needs in Nanotechnology published (EN, DE).</p> <p>Publications of proceedings from the Dublin conference (on systems for early identification of skill needs) and the Cyprus expert workshop (on a European approach in skill needs forecasting)</p>	<p>Governing Board, Cedefop</p> <p>Anticipating Europe's skill needs, Warwick University</p> <p>Future skill needs: Innovations in agri-food and forestry-wood chains, Lisbon</p> <p>Number of registered members increased to 140 (from 34 countries) but in addition there is a substantial number of non-registered and active researchers/stakeholders.</p>
Publication of regular Skillsnet newsletters and sector flashes.	<p>Skillsnet sector flashes on skill needs in tourism and Nanotechnology published</p> <p>Two issues of Skillsnet newsletter published.</p>	

Source: Extracted from Cedefop's 2nd Activity Report 2006

Turning to the costs involved in these activities, we can see from Table 7.14 that the core human resource allocation has been small though stable whilst the non-staff budget has tended to fluctuate within an overall upward trend, being used to fund conferences and background research which naturally tend to vary in scale depending on the subject matter. The most interesting feature of the cost structure of activity however, which is not reflected in the table, is the large amount of co-financing that takes place. Thus conferences are normally co-funded by the institute hosting the event; many speakers and attendees at events fund their own travel and accommodation⁵⁸ and time is given freely by network members. The Skillsnet team estimate that Cedefop usually covers less than 50% of the costs of events. It is clear therefore that the level of activity in relation to the outputs achieved is quite high on account of the high degree of financial leverage obtained by Cedefop and therefore that efficiency is achieved.

Table 7.14 Cost of Cedefop involvement in Skillsnet

Year	2003	2004	2005	2006	2007
Non staff Budget available	61 000	112 500	96 590	128 000	227 000 (70 000 of which for AGORA Conference planned for Feb 08)
Supplementary budget from Cedefop's budget surplus				240 000 which funded the skills forecasting study	Possibility for additional study to be funded from the Cedefop Reserve
Human resources within Cedefop			1 project manager 0,5 secretary	1 project manager 0,5 secretary	1 project manager 0,5 secretary
Human resources outside Cedefop			100 days of external expert	100 days of external expert	100 days of external expert

Source: Cedefop Skillsnet Team

⁵⁸ Funding for travel and accommodation tends to be reserved for people who cannot get their own organisation to provide requisite support.

7.4.7 Measuring effectiveness and impact

It is challenging to determine whether an organisation is being effective in activities of this type and we must of necessity resort to using proxy measures. One indication of how they are perceived by the wider community being served is the extent to which members of that community are willing to input their own resources (both material and intellectual) and on this count Cedefop is clearly being effective, having successfully brought together groups of individuals together a relevant set of topics.

More generally, our assessment of Cedefop's success in this field needs to be contextualised against a broader question of whether it was the right agency in Europe to pick up the issue. Our view is that it appears that no other organisation has responded to the expressed need for the development of skills forecasting methods at European level. Other international organisations are only currently providing piecemeal solutions (for example, the OECD records current adult skills, the EuroFound has started some work on identifying skills needs but only at regional level, and DGEMPL has also recently started work on skills forecasting but at the sectoral level). Hence Cedefop is filling a gap by working to identify broad future skills needs at the European level. The Skillsnet project managers affirm that Cedefop responded to demands by EU policy makers and experts in the field to coordinate such a European forecasting exercise⁵⁹. Cedefop has thus clearly filled a gap and has used its unique position to develop thinking about how to tackle the difficult issues of identifying and tracking skills needs across Europe.

7.4.8 Policy-related work and the Copenhagen process – the example of Cedefop's contribution to Helsinki

As we have noted many times during the course of this report, the period from 2001 to 2006 has been one of major development in the field of VET. Specifically this has involved the development of a coherent body of VET policy through the Copenhagen process. It was important therefore that the evaluation examined the effectiveness and impact of Cedefop's inputs to this developing process. The Copenhagen process began in 2002 with the launch of the Copenhagen Declaration (as discussed in chapter 2) and the putting in place of a process of biennial reviews in 2004 and 2006. The review process involves preparatory background work and meetings of the DGVTs and culminates in a Ministerial meeting every two years. These meetings took place at Maastricht in the autumn/winter of

⁵⁹ "The Cyprus workshop held in October 2005 to explore the feasibility of a European skills needs forecasting system was attended by experts in forecasting of occupations, skills and/or educational fields from 14 European countries. All participants agreed on the feasibility and indeed the urgency of a European forecasting exercise and asked Cedefop to coordinate further steps." (Cedefop note entitled 'About Skillsnet')

2004 and at Helsinki in the same period in 2006. In order to assess Cedefop's contribution it was agreed that we should examine its inputs to the last of these reviews, at Helsinki.

7.4.8.1 *The nature of Cedefop's involvement in Helsinki*

In order to understand Cedefop's involvement in policy reporting in the context of Helsinki, it is necessary to understand how it became involved in the Copenhagen process in general, especially as this sheds light on the extent to which Cedefop's role has developed since 2001. To do this we must look back to the processes that developed around the Maastricht set of meetings in 2003 and 2004 when the organisation was asked by DGEAC to participate in a study of developments in VET which it was commissioning as input to the Maastricht meeting. Cedefop was asked to contribute to drawing up the Terms of Reference for the study in 2003 and to participate in the Steering Group.

In the event, the resulting 'Maastricht report'⁶⁰ was considered to be too large for policy makers and Cedefop was asked to produce a 'synthesis report' which could combine its findings with other materials. Cedefop produced its synthesis report quickly over the autumn of 2004 and was asked to present it at the Maastricht meeting. It subsequently received the mandate to support the policy reporting process. Consequently, in 2005, during the preparation of the Medium Term Priorities, Cedefop included it as a main priority. A team to take forward policy reporting was then assembled, being finally in place on 1st January 2006 when the two members of the team were fully in place alongside the Head of Area. Cedefop's involvement has thus developed from an 'activity' into a 'project' and a team has been consolidated with the aim of achieving synergies by bringing together research and policy work.

Cedefop was more closely involved in preparations for Helsinki. From the outset it was decided that Cedefop would produce another synthesis report (which subsequently became entitled *Zooming in on 2010*) which did not provide policy makers with 'the usual list of activities and countries' but which would combine different sources and in particular 'communicate the research findings'. It was thus intended to draw on a number of sources including some studies being commissioned by DGEAC which would include surveys of DGVTs and a set of complementary studies being commissioned under the aegis of the Fourth Research Report.

Problems beyond the control of the policy reporting team, however, meant that Cedefop had to take on the task of running the DGVT surveys. As a consequence, instead of delivering the synthesis report to the Helsinki Ministerial meeting a small 'brochure' was

⁶⁰ Undertaken by a consortium led by the UK's QCA

developed - effectively a summary of the final synthesis report, called *Four years on – stay focused* for the Ministerial.

In addition, since it had not been possible to present the synthesis report *Zooming in on 2010* at the December Ministerial, it was decided to present it at an AGORA event in 2007, planned to discuss the follow up of the Helsinki Communiqué. There were some 178 registered attendees from 30 countries: 37 Cedefop staff, 11 EC staff, and 130 overall listed as 'delegates'. Cedefop was able to present an 'advanced proof copy' of 'Zooming in on 2010' at the meeting; it was published in August 2007.

Zooming in on 2010 itself is inevitably broad in scope in attempting to map progress in relation to the objectives for VET being taken forward through the Copenhagen process. An examination of the document shows that it tries to address a vast range of issues including:

- Open and flexible pathways
- Governance
- Finance
- VET quality
- Validation of non-formal and informal learning
- Teachers and trainers
- Labour market skills needs
- Lifelong learning; and
- Learner and worker mobility.

Clearly, it would be a challenge for any organisation to attempt to synthesise from existing research and policy documents the progress being made in relation to these areas. The evidence base is highly variable both in extent and quality and – as Cedefop acknowledges - this is reflected in the strength of the coverage of the different elements within the report. Cedefop used a wide variety of sources including academic research, 'grey' literature and countries' own assessments provided through their responses to the DGVT survey carried out. This made for a challenging process, not least in trying to take into account the highly variable inputs from the DGVTs.⁶¹ Our assessment of the processes they used were that they were suitable for the task in hand and given the resources at their disposal.

⁶¹ Verified through our own assessment of the planning and actual time-line for activities in relation to Helsinki which we carried out as part of the evaluation.

7.4.9 Cedefop's role

Whilst clearly it was, in one sense, 'natural' for Cedefop to become involved in the Copenhagen process, it was important for us to understand what the organisation hoped to achieve through this and how it perceived its role. In particular, in this developing role for Cedefop, a key issue for us as evaluators was to understand where its boundaries lie, since this activity takes it outside of its traditional 'open source' role and into new territory.

Staff members articulated a number of aspects to its role:

- to assist the DGVT in 'meeting its objectives'; they are 'consultative' with all the DGVTs, as with the survey for instance;
- to raise awareness of issues, especially in the new Member States; and 'to identify areas for particular attention, not impose priority areas';
- to highlight the most crucial issues, 'on the basis of strong evidence and identify gaps', and 'to signal where more work is needed';
- 'to inform progress';
- to show possible options countries may take, through being a vehicle for sharing practice;
- to improve statistical databases and to establish forecasting systems (a reference especially to their work in the skills field – cf the *Skillsnet* case study)..

In general then this is very much a supportive function which Cedefop takes. Equally there are boundaries here to be negotiated. Staff members' views varied as to the extent to which their role involved 'influencing' or 'shaping'. It was pointed out that Cedefop cannot make 'recommendations' because of the principle of subsidiarity; rather, it must offer up 'messages'. There was general acceptance that within Member States Cedefop's messages can support policy makers in putting forward 'an internal case for change'. In the words of one member of staff, Cedefop's reports 'give them [policy makers] something they can show... They can say "Cedefop said this..." Naturally from the evaluation point of view this makes the task of identifying impacts a difficult one.

7.4.9.1 *User perspectives from the DGVTs and the European Commission*

In general, DGVTs acknowledged that the role of Cedefop in the Copenhagen process had been valuable and that it plays an important intermediary role between Member States and the Commission, as this collection of quotations illustrates.

- *'Cedefop fulfils an important pan-European role in providing a focus on VET beyond our national remits.'*
- *'Cedefop provides an important role as an 'at distance' intermediary between national VET systems and the European Commission. This distance encourages national bodies to engage more readily.'*
- *'Cedefop has undertaken a valuable role in the Copenhagen process through its ability to be an objective intermediary between DGVTs and the Commission.'*
- *'Cedefop has played a central role in bringing member states together over VET. It has helped us to share ideas, knowledge, and it facilitates important dialogue between member states.'*
- *'Cedefop has been instrumental in implementing the 2010 Education and Training Programme. It provides us with critical and objective analysis through its expertise.'*
- *'The content of publications can be stimulating in that they can help us to analyse the situation in our own country and identify what to improve.'*

Some DGVTs also identified the positive effect of recent changes: *'In the past Cedefop has tended to set its own priorities. We welcome current actions by Cedefop to identify priorities via stakeholder engagement and consultation, and this should result in better 'buy-in' to their activities.'*

There tended to be a particularly positive view from new Member States: *'The comparative picture that Cedefop provided of pan-EU VET is very helpful to a New Member State joining a 27-state union. This has helped us to focus internal studies and to set realistic objectives'*.

Within this generally positive picture negative comments tended to focus on the production of too much information and too many publications that were too general and too descriptive. As one DGVT commented: *'DGVTs need to be given highly focused products that provide access to the latest developments...'*

Views from the Commission were more mixed but generally it was also felt that Cedefop has effectively supported the development of the European policy framework, provided an overview of VET systems and enabled gaps to be spotted, and raised the profile of VET, which is important from the point of view of the development of Lisbon, as we noted in

chapter 2. It was also felt that it has struck the right balance between responding to bottom-up demands from stakeholders and top-down policy requests from the EU. The view was also expressed, however, that Cedefop had to develop from its traditional 'artisanal' approach and to become more systematic in its analysis across 27 Member States.

7.4.9.2 *Resources and efficiency*

As we noted in chapter 6, throughout the evaluation period Cedefop lacked an activity-based reporting process and this particularly affects what we are able to say about the deployment of resources in relation to reporting for Helsinki. Whilst a team of two plus the Head of Area were in place in from January 2006, they drew on a wide range of resources and individuals across the organisation in their efforts to pull together the documents that formed the basis for their inputs to Helsinki. However, as far as we know, no record exists of how much time actually went into the process.

That said, given the challenges involved in putting together the wide-ranging outputs required with the staff and time available, there is no doubting that efficiency was achieved in terms of straightforward inputs compared to outputs. Looked at in the round, however, there is evidence of a less than perfect process. Two factors are especially salient here. First, difficulties were experienced in terms of securing time from (already busy) experts within the organisation who did not have Helsinki written into their work programmes. This meant in-house expertise was unevenly distributed across the topics covered in *Zooming in on 2010*. Secondly, rather than making use of Refernet to provide inputs in relation to progress in individual Member States, a separate survey was made of the DGVTs. It seems odd that Refernet was not considered to be a suitable vehicle for this exercise.

In the round, the picture that is painted by these facts is of an organisation attempting to engage strategically in a process at a time when it was not properly configured in terms of its operations to do so, its organisational set-up largely being arranged to deliver its traditionally dominant 'open source' objective. The rigidities of its operating framework as a European agency meant that it did not have the flexibility to deploy resources quickly and effectively to the new area of preparing for Helsinki. It thus struggled to make its contribution although it nonetheless did so 'against the odds', as we elaborate below. Since this time, of course, as we have already seen, some important organisational changes have taken place – including bringing Refernet into the same activity Area as policy reporting - which has the potential to ensure that it is not in the same position again.

7.4.9.3 *Effectiveness and impact*

The basic story behind Cedefop's involvement in Helsinki, and indeed in the Copenhagen process, is one of progressively closer involvement to the point where the organisation is now closely bound into it. This is a role it has been granted largely at the behest of the Member States and we take this as a good indicator of the effective role it has developed. Direct evidence of impact is difficult to come by in this as in other areas of activity but Member States perceive the organisation's role to be to provide analysis of VET policy and practice that enables them to share experience and to find ways to improve their own VET. Impacts are thus inevitably filtered by the Member States who take from Cedefop's output what they most value. Member States value Cedefop because it provides them with the material to make informed choices about how to develop their systems in light of the Copenhagen objectives. If Cedefop is meeting their need for focused analysis, then its objective is being met. The fact that the organisation was over-subscribed for its AGORA meeting early in 2007 and attracted interest from participants from senior levels and across a wide range of backgrounds reflects well on the organisation and indicates the strength of the position it has been able to establish in the Copenhagen process from comparatively inauspicious beginnings. At the same time, it is important to acknowledge that there is inevitably some ambiguity around the boundaries of activity in this new area (does it support policy development or influence it?), and that Cedefop has so far been able to navigate this successfully is also an achievement.

The most significant criticism voiced by DGVTs is that Cedefop should try to be more focused in its outputs, and to make more concise documents for Ministers. In the production of its brochure for the Ministerial meeting in Helsinki we note recognition of this fact by the organisation. Indeed, learning has clearly been extracted from the experiences of Maastricht and Helsinki and is being put into action by improving the process for reporting on progress to Paris in December 2008, not least through the drawing together of a larger, more consolidated team. Policy reporting has now been put on a solid basis.

7.4.9.4 *Europass*

Another area where we are able to offer a view on Cedefop's activities in the field of research, advice and policy support is Europass. This can cast some light on Cedefop's role as a developer and provider of tools to support EU policy since the organisation has developed and maintains Europass web resources (in cooperation with DG EAC) and supports the network of National Europass Centres (NECs). Whilst Europass was not a case study for the evaluation we have nonetheless gathered data which helps us to take a view on the effectiveness of a mode of operation which is distinctive from those we have so far examined in this field. We thus stress that whilst we have not been able to track the

origins or development of Cedefop’s role in relation to Europass in a robust enough manner to report it here, we are nonetheless able to offer some perspectives on the current effectiveness of this particular role that Cedefop plays.

7.4.9.5 *Outputs and user perspectives*

Cedefop began to host the Europass portal in February 2005. This provides access to a number of key Europass resources that can be downloaded, and then completed and used by EU citizens. The table below shows the rate of take-up of Europass tools such as the European CV and language template, and shows how the rates increased over the first two years, although clearly this is such a short period that it would be unwise to make any judgement at this stage. Nonetheless, it should be noted that the European Commission has a target of 3 million citizens to have used Europass documents by 2010 and although we do not have figures on the extent to which downloads equals usage, the figures in Table 7.15 do suggest an effective launch by Cedefop and levels of access that might support achievement of the targets.

Table 7.15 Europass Outputs 2001-2006

YEAR	2001	2002	2003	2004	2005	2006
Unique visitors to Europass website					1,516,959	2,670,501
Number of Europass website visits					1,771,499	3,050,000
Total downloads: templates, instructions etc					2,982,947	3,738,622
CV templates downloaded from Europass website					665,947	1,007,311
Documents generated online by users					300,000	744,154

Source: Europass Activity Statistics document supplied by Cedefop

In terms of the views of users, it should be noted by way of context that the web surveys paint a generally very positive picture of the views of intermediary bodies and users with regard to Cedefop’s contribution to the implementation of Community programmes and EU policy. Intermediary bodies in particular were extremely positive about Cedefop’s contribution, with 82% indicating that they made some sort of impact (60% ‘to a great extent’). As might be expected, users were less aware of this function and consequently

69% indicated that they thought Cedefop had made an impact (46% 'to a great extent'), although the figures are still high.

More specifically, we interviewed four National Europass Centres and they generally gave positive feedback on Cedefop's role in developing and updating document templates on the Europass website. They also found useful the statistics on downloads provided for the Europass website as it is the only indication NECs have about the use of the templates by the wider public. However, interviewees raised some criticism regarding support for the mobility tool, where they regarded Cedefop as having been slow at implementation. Respondents generally believed, however, that Cedefop added value to the Europass tools thanks to their expertise and contacts, as well as to the insight they have on VET issues across the EU. However, some interviewees also added that Cedefop's tasks could equally be carried out by "any other institution or consultancy" and that information exchange about Europass works mainly via exchanges with other National Europass Centres or in the context of study visits and less through direct contact with Cedefop.

Views from the Commission were also positive. Cedefop's experience and expertise and the good quality of the ICT team were valued, as was the cooperation and frequency of contacts with Cedefop on Europass. It was also highlighted that even though the main involvement of Cedefop in Europass was technical, they also participated in the development of the content, improving and extending the document templates and using their contacts with working groups on related projects (e.g. CEN) or initiatives (e.g. EURES) to improve synergies between them.

7.4.9.6 *Effectiveness*

Naturally we cannot offer anything like a comprehensive assessment of Cedefop's effectiveness in relation to Europass. However, we would conclude that the fact that Cedefop was given the remit for Europass is an endorsement of its capabilities to host a tool such as this and to assist in its further refinement. Indeed, without stretching the point too far, the evidence suggests that along with having the capability to assist in the development of policy tools, Cedefop can also successfully launch and support them. Furthermore, documentation review and interviews indicate that many of the tools are gaining momentum both at EU and national level. For example, the Helsinki Communiqué encourages the further development of tools specifically aimed at VET. The fact that these tools are given prominence in the Helsinki Communiqué is proof that they are being recognised as useful and as a basis for further progress to be achieved. Again, it is the assessment of the evaluation that Cedefop deserves some credit for this achievement.

7.4.10 Summary

The bundle of activities we have reviewed under the heading of the consolidated objective of research, advice and policy support are diverse and reflect the different ways in which the organisation tries to realise its objectives. In this respect the three examples of activity upon which we have focused suggest that Cedefop is able to be effective in a variety of *modus operandi*. With Europass, Cedefop has had sufficient credibility to be given the task of hosting, monitoring and developing the key tools; and the statistics and feedback suggest an effective launch. With Skillsnet it has – with limited resources - successfully filled a gap and levered considerable resources from those who have participated. In relation to its contribution to Helsinki our conclusion is that an effective contribution was achieved, in many respects ‘against the odds’, with minimal resources applied to a task of great breadth and complexity.

At the same time, a most significant feature of this field of activity is that it has been the locus for significant change over the evaluation period. Indeed the production of *Zooming in on 2010* and the activities that took place around it, not least the related AGORA meeting of 2007, has been a key operational means by which Cedefop has sought to realise the strategic shift away from its traditional ‘open source’ function, which has been its dominant mode of operation and which has been a constant thread throughout our narrative. Operationally it was poorly equipped to respond to the challenges posed by the developing Copenhagen process, a consequence of rigidities in its operating environment that are a part of its being an agency of the EU. But research and policy analysis were brought closer together during the period covered by the evaluation, and this has culminated in the formation in 2007 of a new Area of activity dedicated to the combined tasks.

We consider policy reporting to be an important priority that is rightly now given strategic prominence amongst Cedefop's activity. Cedefop has a mandate from the EC, MS and stakeholders – who are also the 'consumers' of the reporting - but is also independent, a situation which both constrains what they feel able to say but also gives it credibility and weight.

This role also makes the most of Cedefop's position in VET at the nexus of policy and research. Indeed, the agency is unique in terms of being able to synthesise research and apply it to an unrivalled base of EU VET knowledge. In the zero-sum environment we have referred to many times throughout this report, Cedefop faces the choice of either spreading activities ever more thinly across a widening base of activities or focusing in particular areas. We would identify its role in relation to research as an area where such a choice could usefully be considered, acknowledging – and communicating to its users -

that Cedefop has most value to add as a synthesiser and applier of research rather than as a research organisation itself.

Cedefop's movement into 'policy reporting' has so far placed it in a position of helping to develop the EU VET agenda. Looking forwards, this could provide a platform for further activities. In particular it could provide a sound basis for the development of a 'foresight' process for EU VET that looks beyond the current agenda to identify future trends and issues. Cedefop might facilitate this process, in the first instance, by drawing together experts to look beyond 2010.

8.0 Conclusions and Recommendations

8.1 The Critical Importance of the Background Context for the Evaluation

One of the most striking features to come from reviewing Cedefop over the period between 2001 and 2006 has been the critical importance of the *context* against which it has had to operate. The period has been one of unprecedented change in the external action environment for the agency. It is, therefore, critical that any judgments we make about how successful or otherwise it has been in carrying out its objectives should be seen in this light.

We set out in Chapter 2 our view of how the world of VET has been radically transformed over the period for the study. Between 2001 and 2006 VET moved up in the overall economic and social agenda of the EU to the point at which it became clearly recognised as a key tool in the development of human capital and in the alleviation of social disadvantage. As part and parcel of this the European VET community became more coherent, more focussed and more strategic, adopting the Copenhagen process as a key part of the development of policy and practice. Enlargement also had a profound overarching impact. On top of all this, the Lisbon process fundamentally re-engineered the way in which the key roles in policy learning and policy practice were distributed between the EU institutions and the Member States and regions.

Prior to this period, Cedefop's overall role, and the pre-eminent ethos that had guided its actions for the first 25 years of its existence, had been to act as an 'open source' for VET information and intelligence. However, to address these far-reaching changes, Cedefop has, during the period covered by the evaluation, sought to develop a role in supporting the development of VET policy and its implementation, a role that has emerged to sit alongside its 'open source' function as one of its key strategic functions.

These developments mean that Cedefop is at a strategic crossroads with choices to be made. In developing its policy supporting role Cedefop has taken an important step forwards into an area where it can make the most of its unique position for the benefit of its stakeholders and where it can add significant value. At the same time, we have seen that it has faced some challenges in trying to 'turn the tanker' and that these remain pertinent to its future.

To confront the far-reaching changes in its sphere of interest, Cedefop was armed with the mandate given to it by the 1975 Founding Regulation and by its stand-alone status as the European Agency dedicated to VET policy and practice. This brought with it the prospect of long-term funding support and of resources sufficient to give Cedefop the status of a major player. But since this resource was public funding under a European Parliament budget line, what inevitably also came with it was a close emphasis on regulation and rule compliance. We described something of this in Chapter 3 where we also set out the nature of Cedefop's quadripartite governance structure and the particular challenges and opportunities that this and its status as a European Agency present for corporate management. In Chapter 5 the objective was to give some sense of the strategic issues the Governing Board and senior management had to wrestle with – trying simultaneously to steer the organisation to meet the new demands coming upon it and continue to meet the legitimate claims of stakeholders and users.

In Chapter 6 when we looked at Cedefop through the lens of finance we showed that the agency had to confront a particularly dynamic period of change in the "marketplace" for its actions with a flat line of real available resources and a one-year planning horizon. It was then in Chapter 7 that we looked at how the agency had allocated these scarce resources across its operational objectives to deliver the outputs to serve its mission. By looking at a selection of carefully chosen activities we were able to make some measurement of outputs and how effective and efficient the agency was in getting results. We needed to ask the deceptively simple question *"how successful was Cedefop in delivering its objectives?"* An equally simple answer (without wanting to sound glib) would be *"perhaps remarkably so given the circumstances"*.

What we have seen throughout the report has, then, been an organisation striving to meet fast-changing conditions but finding it challenging to change course and shift its focus. There has indeed been a degree of realignment - particularly after the reorganisation of 2005 under the new management team and with the positive support of the Board. But, as our user surveys in Chapters 4 and 7 also clearly suggested, there is still much more to do and the user community still relates most strongly to Cedefop as an open source reference centre for VET. At the same time, in an environment of flat-line funding, bringing new activities forward means removing others or continuing to spread resources ever more thinly over an ever widening base. It also means trying to please everyone or deciding to give priority to one set of user and stakeholder needs over another.

8.2 Cedefop's Strategy and Response to Change

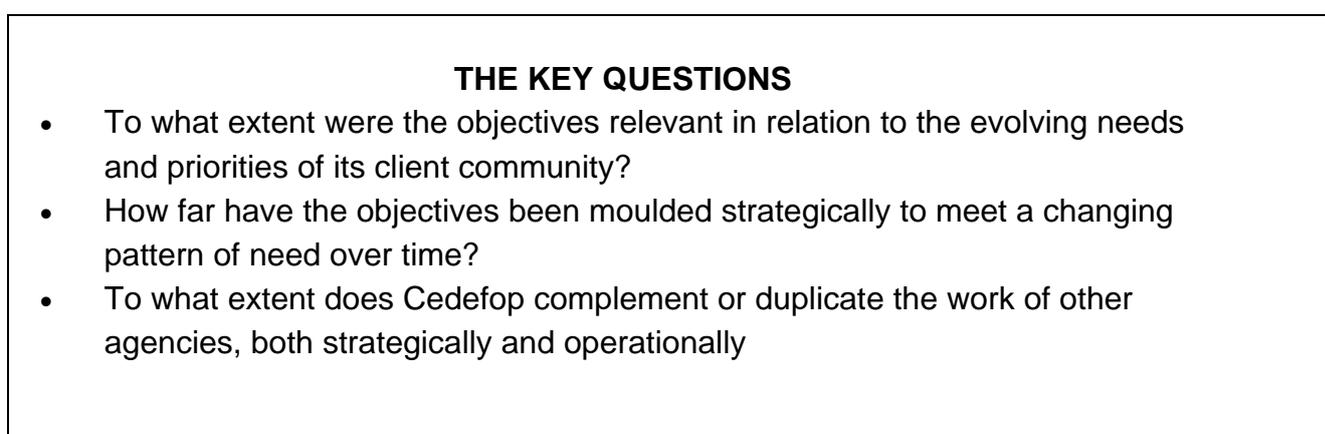
At the beginning of the evaluation we formulated an agreed intervention logic for Cedefop (see Figure 8.1) and used this as the primary lens through which to conduct the evaluation. Our analysis confirms that in delivering the mission given to it under the terms of the 1975 Founding Regulation, Cedefop did pursue a *logical and structured approach*, and there was a *clear and internally coherent strategy* underpinning its objectives and actions. At the same time the range and complexity of its activities is considerable. It was PLS Ramboll in 2001 that identified a "weakness" coming from the fact that the Centre was trying to do too much, often being unable to set "negative priorities". The suggestion was that by becoming more focused, the Centre might increasingly be able both to set the agenda in the VET area and raise the visibility of the Centre. We believe that there is still an argument that Cedefop is trying strategically to do too much, even if as the output measures have shown it is probably currently still *succeeding in doing so*. Some type of prioritisation should be made on the basis of Cedefop's strengths and weaknesses. The agency should especially emphasize those activities that meet a need that it is uniquely placed to fill. This report has given some indications of activities that do this, such as for example the Skillsnet activities in the field of research or the work on the Maastricht and Helsinki reports to support policy implementation.

Seven years on these same questions for strategy still arise (though we have been able to show that some so called "negative priorities" have been adopted since 2005). To some extent the issue of "breadth over focus" is one that is structurally embedded in the way Cedefop is configured in relation to its Founding Regulation; in these circumstances the best that can be hoped for is incremental change at the margin within a process of "judicious realignment". Figure 8.1 captures the post-2001 ambition of forging a closer relationship with the developing European VET agenda by assigning it the status of a higher order specific objective alongside acting as a reference centre for VET and much of the story we have set out across the report has been about gradually trying to shift the focus of the organisation toward a European policy support role while at the same time trying to retain Cedefop's more traditional role. The role of Cedefop's medium-term priorities (MTPs) should not be overlooked in this respect. The MTPs enable Cedefop to translate the tasks in the Founding regulation in the most appropriate way at any given time. The process of deciding Cedefop's medium-term priorities (MTPs) 2009-2011 should be used to review and provide a new strategic balance for Cedefop.

Figure 8.1 The Intervention Logic for Cedefop 2001-2006



8.3 Relevance and complementarity



In terms of the relevance and complementarity criteria in the evaluation design for the study, we set out in Chapter 4 to get a general sense of three things: how well positioned was Cedefop in relation to the evolving needs of the wider user community; how well was it perceived as meeting those needs; and whether it was complementing or duplicating the work of other bodies. In relation to the question of changing needs, we have already seen in the previous section the sorts of challenges that Cedefop has faced and how it has begun to move to respond to them. Acknowledging that change was taking place, the overall impression we gained from the user community at large – both individual users and intermediary bodies - was that they saw Cedefop in a very favourable light. By and large it was seen as relevant and "doing a good job" for them whatever their role or function. The brand was well regarded.

It was here that we could most easily see, however, that users had very different views on what they valued most within the overall portfolio of activities. The bulk of the users told us that what they still were most happy with was Cedefop playing its established role as an open-source reference centre for VET. The responses were slightly more muted when it came to supporting policy development and implementation and providing independent technical advice. What the evidence on relevance does show is that there is strong support for having Cedefop play both roles in concert. At the same time, we found users to be perceiving Cedefop to be playing a complementary role with other agencies, and also found evidence of Cedefop being aware of the need to guard against duplication and taking active steps to be clear as to respective functions. Looking to the future, and given the emergence of Cedefop's dual role, this boundary terrain with other agencies will continue to require active management. More generally, in the case of both relevance and complementarity the issue that still remains to be confronted in the future is: what is the right balance between Cedefop's two main roles?

8.4 Effectiveness, Value-Added and Impact

THE KEY QUESTIONS

- To what extent have the activities been successfully carried out?
- How well have resources been allocated to improve the usefulness to users?
- What impact was made overall for the development of VET in the EU?
- Is the approach to its activities preferable to other ways of delivering the same results?

8.4.1 Effectiveness in delivering the consolidated objectives

In looking at how well the objectives had been carried out we grouped them together in Chapter 7 to place a more simplified framework on the wide portfolio of Cedefop actions. For the consolidated objective for *information, communication and dissemination* the story that emerged was for general overall effectiveness. This, of course, chimes in directly with what has just been said about the agency's role in continuing to serve as the key reference centre for EU VET. There was some concern about the multiplicity of the web sites that presented the agency to the outside world and about design and access. But in general we found no significant weight of critical opinion about the way this cluster of operational activities was carried out over the 2001-2006 period. Indeed, the bulk of the user response was couched in terms of being "positive" or "very positive" about what was being done. Respondents were, however, wanting to suggest improvements in the way various aspects of these activities were carried out and these appear below under our recommendations.

In looking at examples of the allocation of resources to particular actions, the case study of ReferNet showed this to be a well-found concept but we detected a feeling that much more needs to be done to unlock its true potential. Some 60% of ReferNet Consortia respondents felt that 'collecting and analysing VET-related information at EU level' should be 'modified' and we took it that this response indicated concerns about the way things are currently organised. What we can, however, say with some confidence about this cluster of reference centre based objectives is that the sheer volume and breadth of the information and intelligence material (in the widest sense) that "hubs though" and is analysed by Cedefop is impressive and is, a strong element in the value added impact of the agency on the way VET has developed in the EU.

In the same vein, Cedefop's *exchange and cooperation* activities are clearly seen by the users we have canvassed as highly effective in helping it deliver its overall mission. We looked closely at the Study Visits programme and found strong evidence of it being successfully run and highly valued over many years – despite limited funding. It was especially highly valued by participants from the New Member States - with high participation rates during the first 12 months of EU enlargement – but there are issues about spreading resources too thinly as new demands arise without the investment to support them. With respect to our closer look at Virtual Communities, however, we found it much more difficult to come to a view. The idea of using new technologies cost-efficiently to maintain dialogue across a widely dispersed and thematically segmented user group is in theory a sound proposition. But, consistent with what commentators in general say about "virtual" communities, we found it difficult capture a measure of the real benefits. This consolidated objective emerges as one of the headline sources of value added for

Cedefop – providing a "space" for dialogue. The users we canvassed wanted more of this sort of activity.

The bundle of activities under the heading of the consolidated objective of *research, advice and policy support* are diverse and reflect the different ways in which the organisation tries to realise its objectives. What we found was that Cedefop was able to be effective in a variety of modus operandi. Looking at Europass, Cedefop had the credibility to be given the task of hosting, monitoring and developing the key tools and achieving an effective launch. With Skillsnet it leveraged in significant external resources successfully to fill a knowledge gap. When we looked in detail at Cedefop's contribution to Helsinki we saw it as having been effective in taking on a task of great breadth and complexity with small resources. For *Zooming in on 2010* and the activities that took place around it, we could see Cedefop beginning to realise the strategic shift away from its traditional 'open source' function and play a key policy implementation role. Policy reporting is a "strong suit" for Cedefop and it is right that it is now being given strategic prominence.

8.4.2 Value added and impact

The weight of the evidence that we have set out in the report is that Cedefop represents an organisation with a *very distinct added value*. There simply are no valid alternatives at the moment for what it does and over many of its actions it has no obvious peer. No other organisation has a dedicated focus on VET and a Europe-wide pool of experience and competency applied to the field. Indeed, there is a strong argument that if Cedefop did not exist an organisation that looks something like it would probably have to be invented. This endows the organisation with a heavy weight of responsibility and makes it doubly important that, in the face of fixed resources, it judges where best to apply its special added value. Such a monopoly position can be a source of weakness if it leaves the organisation unable clearly to define and set out its priorities and fosters a climate of complacency. We are happy to report that what we have seen is an active attempt to think through the role of the agency and to set out on a clear future path.

There are a number of areas where it is clear that Cedefop has been able to have positive effects and bring added value. These types of activity represent key strengths of the organisation. They are:

- Synthesising material on VET, pulling together available research and applying it to the situation in Europe in order to interpret what is going on across Member States;
- Being able to host and refine tools to support the implementation of policy such as Europass
- Filling knowledge gaps, as in the case of Skillsnet

- Providing a space where people in the VET field can come together to discuss key points – particularly linking together practitioners and researchers; and
- Supporting the Copenhagen process through – *inter alia*- the production of reports for Maastricht and Helsinki which have been generally well received and which have helped to shape the debate.

8.5 Efficiency

THE KEY QUESTION

- How cost-effectively were resources (inputs) turned into outputs or results?

While it was relatively easy to set out some clear views on value added, relevance and effectiveness, the task of assessing efficiency proved to be far more difficult. Measuring efficiency requires a look at how resource inputs were transformed into activity outputs and some estimation of value for money and comparative costs with other methods of provision or other providers. We have tried to do this but have not been able to achieve an acceptable outcome. Data on efficiency (actual spend per unit output) per activity were required but for the years covered by the study we were faced with very little useable information concerning overall *actual* spend by activity. Activity based *budgeting* was a requirement of the IAS and was beginning to be implemented after the timeframe for the study but for our purposes it came too late. A particular difficulty we faced was to determine the *actual* labour cost input per activity. The system in place was essentially budget -driven with FTEs assigned to activities within each Area and broad variances logged. Looking for output measures we were also frustrated. Measured performance indicators were only comprehensively available for the first time in 2005 and it was possible only to make partial comparability observations between 2005 and 2006. We are happy to report that some of these issues are now being taken on board by the current management team.

It was possible, however, to draw some important conclusions regarding the financial context against which Cedefop was operating and by using proxy measures to illustrate – from the output side - something of the weight of things Cedefop achieved over the study period. As a matter of simple observation, the scale of activity has been simply enormous. It was for this reason – impressionistic though it is – that we asked Cedefop to set out a factual description of what it produces under each of the consolidated objectives in Chapter 7 to show the range of things that we did not look at in detail. From what we do

know about flat funding and from what we can see as trends in the quantity of general output it would be churlish in the extreme not to suggest that – though we cannot measure it – all the signs are that in the ratio of inputs to outputs Cedefop can lay good claim to be considered as efficient.

8.6 Consolidated Recommendations

At this point in the report we come to the recommendations. We have, of course, offered suggested actions at various points throughout the study and our task here is simply to bring together a selection of the most important ones in summary form. We have set them out under three headings – *strategic, operational and internal management*. We have also indicated to whom they may best be addressed.

8.6.1 Strategic Issues

A constant refrain throughout the study has been the need to find more effective ways to assist Cedefop more effectively to respond to the rapid change taking place in its external action environment. The Community Agency model has a long history and is a well-established format for supporting EU policy making and implementation. We feel, however, that from what we have seen the model - while it offers security and a position of standing in a given policy domain - is not one that can also endow an organisation like Cedefop with the flexibility it needs to reposition in response to a changing world. It is, therefore, unsurprising that we find ourselves repeating many of the recommendations from PLS Ramboll in 2001 about "rationalising the portfolio and focusing more clearly on a more limited number of strategic activities". We believe that, to a substantial degree, the issue is a structural one and only capable of being dealt with by Cedefop itself within the limits of its established institutional position. In this context we would also repeat our earlier question about how far the 1975 Founding Regulation is still functional without at least some degree of amendment. The Regulation is, we acknowledge, widely drawn but where flexibility and the ability to shift focus is required – as we believe it is – then the onus is placed firmly upon Cedefop to find a way through. We have been sympathetic throughout the report to the difficulties the agency faces in this respect. The question, of course, is "what to do about these issues that is of practical value and has the prospect of implementation?" Having raised the highest level structural issues above we will not presume to make recommendations here on the form of Community Agencies or the substance of the Founding Regulation. But we do think they form important context for the recommendations we shall go on to make.

Recommendations for strategy at Cedefop

- 1) Since the strategic objectives to which Cedefop is working are clear and coherent in relation to the overall mission they should be used to drive a management-by-objectives culture into day-to-day practice and cascaded throughout the entire staff;
- 2) Cedefop should continue to search creatively for ways to reduce the breadth of its activity portfolio, to focus its resources on a smaller number of core activities and to further consolidate its management with the aim of maximising strong leadership across the resulting functional areas; *Cedefop* should use the opportunity presented by the need to formulate its Medium Term Priorities for 2009-11 to address the strategic balance in its operations between open source provision on the one hand and the policy support function on the other.
- 3) The active realignment of the organisation toward a more balanced dual form should continue with a clear strategy to promote the recognition across its entire constituency that it has *two* specific objectives – *to provide support as a reference centre for VET issues; and to contribute to and support the implementation of the EU VET policy priorities;*
- 4) Active consideration should continue to be given to deleting elements of the activity portfolio that (even though successful on their own terms) make it more difficult to achieve a balance between its two specific objectives;
- 5) In order to achieve (3) direct action should be taken to bring the issues before the wide constituency of users; to consult them and to solicit their assistance either in finding the necessary additional resources or in making the choices more acceptable;
- 6) In the event of continued flat line funding, active steps should be taken to assemble an investment/restructuring fund (within the allowable rules) to allocate development resources to new ventures and to break out of the zero-sum cycle of paring down;

Recommendations for the Commission

There are two ways in which the Commission could support the agency in delivering on these recommendations:

- 7) Assisting Cedefop in exploring ways to enable it to respond more flexibly to the strategic demands placed upon it;
- 8) Exploring with the relevant European services and institutions how it might be possible within the Regulations to give Cedefop a longer-term planning horizon for its actions.

8.6.2 Operational Issues

We make a number of recommendations in relation to the more detailed operational issues that we have come across during the course of the evaluation. Naturally these are focused on those areas where we have been able to 'drill down' into Cedefop's activity portfolio. We have structured them according to the three consolidated objectives used in Chapter As might be expected, they are aimed at Cedefop itself.

Recommendations for Cedefop

- *Information, Communication and Dissemination*

- 9) Conduct a review of strategy of information and communication services to target the information needs of specific groups of stakeholders who use different types and format of information (*also in Ramboll 2001*). We would see this as an action yet to be taken and would add the following components as part of such a review:
 - a. develop a publications strategy designed to maximise access specifically for key decision makers;
 - b. undertake a fundamental review of the web sites, consolidate individual Web sites into a single clearly defined corporate web site and move towards coherence both of corporate image, and of the tools that are provided for navigation;
 - c. consider having a single source of news items on the Cedefop web site and apply a consistent 'house style' for the communication of news, and all related information;
 - d. consider making the Online Library more easily accessible and usable, with publications produced by Cedefop being available also in HTML formats.
 - e. use the web site and publications to communicate the essence of the adjusted mission, and its rationale to the outside world, and to communicate it more effectively to the wider customer community.
- 10) With specific reference to ReferNet:
 - a. carry out a critical assessment of the outputs and activities requested from ReferNet on the basis of the budget available (an option would be to reduce the frequency of the required updates for eKnowVet in order to reduce the workload);
 - b. review the activities undertaken by the network and prioritise those that are more relevant for the achievement of their objectives and taking into account the strategic purpose of the network;

- c. undertake an on-going assessment of performance as a way of addressing underperformance, especially with 4 year framework partnership agreements;
- d. more interaction between ReferNet consortia from different countries should be further developed.

Exchange and cooperation

- 11) Means should be sought to extend and develop the Study Visits programme as a platform for the identification, dissemination and exchange of good practice in VET across the EU;

More specifically:

- a. information communicating the public value of Study Visits should be placed directly on the website (the information already exists in printed publications prepared by the SV team);
- b. the Study Visits should be used as a strategic resource within Cedefop and should be systematically linked to other activity areas;
- c. the added value questionnaires should be used as a tool for tracking longitudinal impact – analysing their content and employing them as an impact indicator to see what attendees *actually do* with the learning they acquire;
- d. a specific "impact analysis" study of the three peer learning study visits should be set in train as a matter of priority;
- e. consistent with the recommendation under communication the means should be found to dedicate more Study Visits specifically to policy makers.

Research, Advice and Policy Support

- 12) More attention should be given to the production of more concise, timely and better focused outputs particularly dedicated to the needs of policy makers;
- 13) A clearer position should be established for Cedefop – that it communicates to its community of users and stakeholders – that locates it at the nexus of policy and research, emphasising its unique role as a synthesiser and applier of the latest research to EU VET problems;
- 14) It should use the platform it has developed through policy reporting to begin to develop a 'foresight' process on behalf of VET stakeholders in Europe, in the first instance assembling a team of leading experts to meet on a regular basis to identify and explore emerging issues beyond 2010 to feed into the agenda development process at EU level.

8.6.3 Internal Management Issues

Although we were given an early steer to concentrate the evaluation less on internal management matters than those to do with strategy and operations we believe we do have some suggestions to offer here in relation to those matters that had an effect on the evaluation process.

- 15) An approach to activity-based financial *reporting* needs to complement activity-based budgeting. Such a system of activity based budgeting has now been introduced by Cedefop and will be used in 2008 for the first time. If this system is also used to monitor and report on activity, it will enable Cedefop to assess accurately the actual resources applied to activities (as opposed to those *budgeted* for) and will assist in making strategic choices knowing the opportunity cost of each activity;
- 16) There is a need to develop more the evaluation culture within Cedefop. As a step in this direction, measures for value for money and for effectiveness (unit costs, comparative cost analysis) need to be installed in order that the organisation can periodically take stock of its performance and in order to assist future evaluations. This should include taking steps to move output estimation from simple visibility and access indicators to more quantitative metrics, surveys and interviews so that the agency can report impact as well as visibility.