Final Evaluation of the Community Programmes Socrates II, Leonardo da Vinci II and eLearning

Synthesis of Socrates and Leonardo da Vinci National Reports

Contents

1 Introduction

This report presents a synthesis of the country-specific National Reports produced by National Authorities for the European Commission and concerning the implementation and impact of the Socrates II and Leonardo da Vinci II programmes in their respective countries. The production of these reports was required by the decisions adopting these programmes in the Member States, EEA countries and (pre)- accession countries. The aim of the second phase of Socrates was to promote a Europe of knowledge and encourage life long education through learning foreign languages, encouraging mobility, promoting cooperation at European level, opening up to methods of access to education and increasing the use of new technologies in the field of education in participating countries. The aim of Leonardo da Vinci was to develop a European area of cooperation specifically in the field of vocational training by encouraging mobility and promoting cooperation.

National Reports from the following countries were used to prepare this synthesis: Austria, Belgium (French speaking and Dutch speaking), Bulgaria, Cyprus, the Czech Republic, Denmark, Estonia, Germany, Hungary, Italy, Lithuania, Luxembourg, the Netherlands, Norway, Romania, Spain, Sweden, Turkey and the UK. The other countries involved did not provide a national report prior to August 17th 2007, the deadline set for the purposes of this synthesis.

This synthesis report presents information and data concerning:

- the implementation of the programmes, in terms of the activities funded, priorities and objectives covered and access to the programmes;
- management issues; and
- the impact of the programmes.

An indication will also be given as to how well the guidelines issued by the Commission have been adhered to by the national authorities in preparing the National Reports.

As a general rule, in producing this synthesis, we have followed the summaries and conclusions as presented in the National Reports without providing the underlying data presented in the country reports. Sometimes these data are lacking, in general because data at a more detailed level cannot be compared since definitions and concepts (such as satisfaction and employability) have been operationalised differently in each country. However, we have no reason to assume that the summaries and conclusions presented in the National Reports are not underpinned by the data gathered. The exception to this rule concerns the reach of the

programmes in terms of persons and institutes involved and the impact of the programmes. In this we have made our own assessment combining indices used by the authors of the reports, as well as their own conclusions.

2 Quality of the reports

The Commission issued guidelines to be followed by the national authorities in preparing the reports. These concerned:

(1) the methodology to be followed,
(2) the specific composition of the report; and
(3) the questions to be addressed.

The choice of methodology employed was left relatively free, whereas the other two requirements were stricter. The reports had to consist of sections detailing the context and methodology used, implementation activities, the impact of the programmes, the programme management and a general conclusion. The questions to be addressed in the reports were provided and were quite clear and detailed.

The fact that the methodology to be used was left relatively free resulted in a degree of inconsistency in reporting between the countries. Although data on the number of beneficiaries, their characteristics, and satisfaction with the programmes etc. were reported, the units in which the data are reported tended to differ. When trying to assess the number of persons engaged in mobility for instance, one finds that sometimes only the number of mobility projects is mentioned or the number of institutes involved, with no information given as to the number of persons involved. Furthermore, reliable data on the exact impacts of the programmes appear elusive. Given the time frame and the relatively modest resources available (as is indicated in some reports), as well as the large numbers and diversity of beneficiaries, none of the reports provide a comprehensive and direct impact analysis. Rather, information concerning the impact, especially at institute and national (policy) level, is largely anecdotal and based on indirect evidence.

The majority of reports comply with the requirements concerning their composition. All reports address the context, the methodology used, implementation activities, the impact of the programmes, programme management, and provide recommendations and general conclusions. The exception to this is the report for Bulgaria, which does not follow this format.

As to the questions to be addressed, most reports have left some important questions untouched, most importantly those concerning the reach of the programmes. This concerns the issue of how many institutes and/or students from within the eligible population in a given country were reached by the programmes. The exceptions to this gap are the reports from Belgium, the Czech Republic, Germany, Hungary, Luxembourg, Norway and Sweden. The reports from these

countries generally reiterate the questions as given by the Commission and systematically address them, although sometimes – as with the report filed by Sweden – a clear answer is not given, due to lack of data or the specific methodology followed.

As a general observation it would perhaps have been better to sharpen the guidelines in the sense that countries could have been asked to explicitly list each question and address each one of them in turn. Also, the guidelines concerning the methodology to be followed could have been more detailed, especially in terms of the units in which the reporting is to be done. This would make future reports more easily comparable.

3   Programme objectives and activities

3.1   Objectives and priorities covered

Without exception, in all the National Reports studied, it was indicated that the activities implemented were fully consistent with the programmes' objectives and priorities. Themes covered included equal opportunities, new technology, equality between genders etc. Details on the frequency with which individual objectives and priorities were adopted are generally not given, however. Six countries indicated that they entertained specific national priorities. These were Sweden, Turkey, Romania, Norway, Bulgaria and Germany. Sweden, Romania and Germany did so for the Leonardo da Vinci programme; Turkey, Norway and Bulgaria for both programmes and actions. In all six countries an attempt was made to ensure an equal distribution among the various regions in the country, or to target specific economically disadvantaged areas.

3.2   Activities implemented

As would be expected from the design of the programmes, decentralized activities such as the mobility projects, and partnerships and network projects in both programmes, were the measures most frequently implemented. Those activities with a much lower profile (i.e. very few or no references) included Lingua and Minerva activities, reference projects under the Leonardo programme, as well as measures under observation and innovation, joint actions and the accompanying measures in the Socrates programme, including activities under (Euro) guidance. The fact that this is so would seem logical since national authorities were asked to focus on these decentralised actions, as these are the ones they know best.

3.3   Mobility

In studying the reports we have sought indications concerning the extent to which the mobility tracks in the two programmes were successful in attracting beneficiaries, and whether their numbers increased during the course of the programmes. The increases (or decreases) noted concern year by year variations and are concomitant with budget increases or decreases. We have also noted what proportion of beneficiaries is indeed being reached by the programmes relative to the total number of eligible persons. We have studied this for mobility programmes of the Socrates programme (Erasmus, Grundtvig and Comenius) and the Leonardo programme. Results are as follows:

The vast majority of the countries report an increase in the number of those benefiting from the mobility tracks in the Socrates II and the Leonardo da Vinci II

programmes. There are exceptions to this, however. In the UK and Sweden, for instance, the number of Erasmus students has decreased, while the number of Erasmus students in Denmark has remained stable over time. The National Reports concerned do not provide any additional analyses explaining these phenomena.

In a number of reports, (from Dutch and French speaking Belgium, Germany, Luxemburg and Norway), it is indicated that, despite the fact that the number of learners engaged in mobility activity has increased, their share of the total volume of eligible beneficiaries that participated in the programmes up to 2006 remains low. In Belgium (French speaking), for instance, the share of pupils/ students in Leonardo da Vinci mobility activity is very low: there are 40,000 eligible students and only 670 of them participated in the programme. Other countries do not report these data. In principle, these findings are consistent with similar findings in the literature, such as the MoVEit report undertaken by Price Waterhouse Coopers in 2006 on mobility among VET students, and Eurostat data on mobility of higher education students. The proportion of those being mobile – as it appears also from these studies – is indeed quite low. In the 2006 MovEit report a top 7 lists of obstacles is mentioned as major reasons for this. These are:

(1) lack of communication between beneficiaries (and stakeholders);

(2) sustainability of quality companies for placements;

(3) transparency of qualifications;

(4) the fact that employers do not see advantages;

(5) the fact that institutions do no have a strategy on international mobility

(6) the fact that benefits are not clear and

(7) cultural differences.

In the National Reports themselves no analysis as to the why of the low participation rate in mobility is given.

3.4   Networks and partnerships

In studying the reports we also tried to determine the extent to which the partnerships and networks in the two programmes were attracted and whether their number increased during the course of the programme. In addition, the increases (or decreases) noted concern year by year variations and are concomitant with budget increases or decreases. We have also tried to ascertain what proportion of institutes involved was reached by the programmes, relative to the total number of eligible

institutes. Although it would have been interesting, no data have been seen in the reports to be able to determine what proportion of institutes repeatedly have been beneficiaries, that is repeatedly have been successful in getting grants from the programmes during the course of the programmes. Results are as follows:

(1) It appears that most countries have seen an increase in networks / partnerships in the two programmes, while some countries have remained stable over time.

(2) In those countries that report data on the reach of the programmes[1] , a significant number of institutes were involved in the programmes. In (Dutch speaking) Belgium, for instance, a quarter of all secondary schools participated, while half of all centres for adult education (61 out of 117 of such centres) took part. This also appears to have been the case for Hungary and the Czech Republic.

(3) Where National Agencies and Ministries tried to ensure an equal distribution among the various regions and institutions, these policies generally appear to have been successful.

(4) A point noted in most reports, furthermore, is that the institutions participating in Grundtvig partnerships grew more diverse in nature over time, with many more museums, libraries and municipalities as applicants and partners, in addition to the more traditional adult education institutions.

However, in certain cases the trend was not so positive. Data collected in the UK from the Comenius Action shows that the proportion of schools from economically disadvantaged declined as time went on (falling from 25% to 12%), and that relative decreases were also registered with respect to pupils at risk of exclusion (from 18% to 14%) and pupils with special learning needs (from 12% to 3%). Lack of data from other countries mean that we do not know to what extent this trend was found elsewhere. The UK report only reports factors that might inhibit access to these programmes in general, basically having to do with management and financial procedures. There is no analysis given as to why specifically a decrease has occurred in these areas / with respect to these specific pupils. Also, there is no reason to assume that similar developments would have occurred in the other countries.

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[1] Only Belgium, Luxembourg, Germany, Sweden, Norway, Hungary and the Czech Republic report these data.

3.5 Dissemination and exploitation activities

Dissemination and exploitation activities were undertaken by beneficiaries themselves as well as the National Agencies involved.

In general, the National Reports indicate that beneficiaries in the countries under study put significant effort into the dissemination of results, and indeed all made some attempt to disseminate the results of their projects and/or mobility experiences in one way or another. Popular dissemination tools were networks, meetings, newsletters, presentations, DVDs containing interviews with participants, and publications. Mobility participants often talked about their experiences to other students, generally in an informal setting, but sometimes at a formal event organised by the institution (at an information meeting for new students, for example). Students also reported their experiences through databases (IRIS and RAP4LEO).

The National Agencies were also active in disseminating results of the projects and mobility experiences, in fact after the project co-ordinators they are probably to be seen as the most proactive actors in this. This was done in two main ways. The first entailed offering support in terms of developing guidelines for the valorisation of project results and discussing dissemination issues at workshops; the other was by undertaking joint efforts with the contractors. Several National Agencies (Germany, Norway and the UK) produced publications communicating the experiences of beneficiaries, as well as reports on the impact of activities. These results were also presented in brochures and other information materials. Furthermore, in some cases, detailed studies were launched, evaluating the country's participation in the programmes, detailing participant experiences and lessons learned from participating in activities directed by the programme, what international profile they had developed, in which way participation in projects had affected teaching and learning, whether the institutes utilised time and resources differently as a consequence of participation, and how the internationalisation was received in the local community etc.

Despite this, it appears that dissemination strategies were sometimes difficult to develop, especially on the part of the beneficiaries: their main concern was often the successful completion of the project, rather than the period thereafter. Partnership projects in general were fairly vulnerable in this respect, because the partners had different opinions and the state-of the art varied between the different countries: so in some cases the results of the projects were not of equal practical use to all the organisations and countries involved. Overall, then, the results of the general dissemination appear limited, although there are marked exceptions as the example of the Grundtvig "Open Doors" project, which has had a material effect in promoting prison education in other countries. Also, the extent to which projects yielded results that lent themselves to commercial exploitation is limited. This, however, is not to be

seen as surprising as for Comenius, Erasmus and Grundtvig commercialisation this was not the intention or orientation of the decentralised actions. It only was for the Leonardo da Vinci programme.

In a number of reports it is argued that it is challenging to gauge the effectiveness of dissemination efforts, since it is difficult to separate the effects of the programmes from other (national or sectoral) activities that might have been executed simultaneously. However, numerous examples are given of methodologies and new learning approaches developed in pilot projects that have found their way into industry or other economic sectors (examples include the oil industry, the aluminium industry, the medicine and health care sector, the transport sector, the tourist industry, the mining industry.

Most participants and National Agencies, however, appear quite satisfied with their own dissemination work, although they doubt the effectiveness of exploitation (i.e. the extent to which results are taken up by third parties).

4 Programme management

4.1 General management issues

In the reports details are given as to how the National Agencies organised themselves to deal with the selection and contracting of projects. Sometimes quite extensive details are provided. In this section, we will not deal with these descriptions, but rather highlight a number of common issues and problems the Agencies, as well as beneficiaries, appear to have encountered.

As a first point, in the majority of reports, administration is mentioned as bearing down heavily not only on the applicant but also –where applicable – the institution and the NA involved in processing the application. In some cases, the lack of an online application facility was cited as having been likely to have discouraged some schools from applying and placed an unnecessary process-based burden on NA staff in processing the forms manually.

Perceptions of a high level of administration and what is often seen as rigidity in the 'back office' processes employed by the Commission to determine project approvals is the second most frequently mentioned problem. The general view is that these were too tight and restrictive. Although there is flexibility in some areas to adapt the process to suit the nature of applications when required, establishing a clear and suitable customer-friendly process would benefit those applicants who may experience difficulty in applying (for instance the disabled or SMEs) and in turn complement the reach and impact of the programmes, so it is argued.

A significant proportion of beneficiaries appear to have found the financial documentation very demanding. In some actions the burden was felt most strongly by the management of educational institutions. This was apparently typically the case in larger organisations, where the school administration assists in producing these reports. In other actions, it was typically the project manager who reported a strain resulting from the financial documentation procedure. The group who found the financial documentation most burdensome was Leonardo project managers, mainly those operating the pilot projects, where almost all found the financial documentation procedure too heavy. For the Grundtvig and Comenius programmes institutions and project managers in most country reports reportedly found documentation procedures strenuous.

Problems resulting from the length of the response times (from submission of an application to receiving an answer) were highlighted by institutions with respect to Erasmus and pilot project co-ordinators of Leonardo activities, while difficulties with the application procedures were also prominent with participants and project

managers of Comenius. The application process was judged to be strenuous, extensive and substantial and the reports suggest it was very problematic that different countries had different documentation requirements.

4.2   Financial management

Some of the issues that were addressed in the above section were also mentioned with respect to financial management of the programmes. In summary, the National Reports reviewed highlighted the following points:

- Most participants (especially those in smaller organisations and/or countries) indicated that it was too time-consuming to set up and apply the detailed budgets required. Furthermore, it proved difficult and time-consuming to write reports and perform the necessary accounting. These difficulties basically concerned the procedures around the pilot projects, networks and partnership projects and not the mobility actions. Concerning the Leonardo pilot projects specifically, the reports highlighted that programme procedures were at variance with the everyday administration processes of the participating institutions. An example is the requirement for specification of hourly rates –as mentioned for instance in the Norwegian report. Also, in general, accounting procedures in the member states appear to be less detailed than what is required by the Commission.

- Smaller countries generally indicated that Brussels *"thinks too big for us",* which means that procedures and habits in small countries, such as Luxembourg, in terms of implementing projects in the educational area are considered to be by far less complex than the ones governing EU projects. It was noted that the financial management procedures improved somewhat as a result of greater flexibility during the course of the reference period and that there were fewer issues in relation to decentralized actions.

- In some countries (the UK and the Netherlands), especially in the HE sector, the wish was reported that the Erasmus and Leonardo programmes would offer more commercial incentives to organisations to be able for them to fully participate in the programmes. Institutes in these countries are partly dependent on commercial activities[2].

- A general trend noted in the reports was that institutions that were involved in the programme were generally not entirely satisfied with the size of the grant. This dissatisfaction often referred specifically to the lack of support for staff costs (wages). Participants (in mobility projects) and project managers (of pilot projects,

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[2] This does not mean that the purpose of an EU grant was misunderstood in any way. Only the wish for a commercial incentive was expressed.

partnerships and network projects) on the other hand were generally reasonably satisfied and in fact indicated that they were willing to invest some spare time in the activities[3].

- A majority of managers / policy makers participating in the Arion actions stated that the grant met the administrative demands to only a limited degree. Participants themselves were more positive, however.

4.3 Other issues

Two further observations may be made regarding the evaluation of the financial and management procedures:

- Eastern EU countries were less critical than Western EU and Scandinavian countries regarding the procedures, although they did nevertheless indicate having problems with them;
- Problems also occurred as a result of there being differences across countries in terms of deadlines for project approval, confirmation of level of funding and submission of end of year reports. This problem was specifically noted in the Estonian report with regard to Grundtvig projects. No further details have been provided in this report.

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[3] Comparing this finding with any statistical or survey data is difficult as it is derived from many different sources such as focus groups, data gathered at conferences and (limited) surveys among project managers.

5   Impacts

In this chapter we discuss impacts (at participant and national / systems levels), the EU dimension and transversal issues. Examples of best practices included in the reports are also given, together with the recommendations made by the Member States.

5.1   Impact at participant level

In reviewing results at the participant level, we have primarily used the information in the summary and conclusion sections of the reports, as it appeared that methodologies used to arrive at the conclusions differed widely among the various reports. Some (such as Belgium (Dutch speaking) and the Netherlands) produced quantitative survey data on the satisfaction of participants and the gains they had made in acquiring (new) competences. Most, however, used only qualitative data from focus groups, individual reports of participants and interviews.

Without exception, all reports indicate that the mobility component of the programmes had a very significant impact at participant level: it was reported that all programmes had a very positive effect regarding the development of the personal, language and professional skills of those who participated. The evidence presented in the country reports also indicates that the vast majority of people who were involved in mobility activity were very satisfied with the experience. The benefits reported most frequently included growth in self-confidence and improved prospects in the labour market, especially for pupils/ students. A significant number of participants in mobility actions indicated that they expected to have gained an advantage in terms of finding employment within their own or another EU country.

As a general rule, improvements were reported in:

- soft skills (communication skills, self confidence, self awareness and the ability to work with others);
- language competencies;
- cultural awareness; and
- professional competencies.

5.2   Impact at national system and policy level

As with the data on implementation, we have sought evidence concerning the impacts that were achieved by the Socrates II and Leonardo da Vinci II programmes on national systems and at the policy level. Here we have made a distinction

between large impacts, moderate impacts and limited impacts in the various educational fields targeted by the programmes and national policies. In assessing the impacts we have drawn upon the conclusions in the National Reports and have also reviewed the indicators that were used to underpin them. Impacts are considered large when it was indicated in the reports that laws and regulations changed as a result of the programmes or specific projects. Impacts are considered moderate when results have been successfully disseminated to at least identical target groups outside the partnerships and have been taken up by them. Impacts are considered limited where results were not taken up by groups/individuals outside the immediate partnership.

Results reported were as follows:

(1) Influencing the various systems could occur in two different ways. Impacts could result from partnerships / network projects and pilot projects and from mobility especially when teaching personnel were involved. Teaching personnel brought their experience to bear and sometimes made significant impacts at the institutional level.

(2) In most countries the two programmes appear to have had moderate impacts, with two countries in particular -Lithuania and Norway- reporting relatively large impacts. The programmes appear not to have had significant impacts on national policies and systems: the vast majority of countries reported a limited impact here.

(3) Countries generally reported that language learning and teaching, innovation, and the introduction of new teaching and learning methods generated as a result of the programmes did effect positive change at the institutional level. The impact of the programmes tended to be rather insubstantial at the national / political level, however, although most reports did indicate there were isolated successful exceptions to this general rule. The reports also point to the fact that the activities supported by the programmes interrelated with other relevant processes of change within countries and that discrete effects of the programmes could not easily be isolated. It is difficult to partial out the effects of the programmes from the effects of national policies/developments in other words.

(4) In general, the reports attribute a failure to achieve a more significant reach in terms of institutional impacts to the fact that a limited number of institutes participated in the programme, that many institutes were repeat applicants, and/or that dissemination of the results of the programme was not optimal. In the latter case, a major contributory factor was reported to be that too few

stakeholders were involved who had an influence at a national/systems level and who therefore had the potential to drive forward any new policies.

5.3   The European dimension

Most countries reported that the programmes introduced a European (or sometimes international) dimension, to a moderate extent, in the various educational fields. This means that as a result of transnational cooperation with partners from different European countries, the policies of the institutes and government departments involved have become more Europe oriented. Most of the reports presented the main benefit as being the establishment of interesting networks, together with the development of tools which can be used to support or build on European policy guidelines for the better of national policies.

The realisation of a true European Education Area is generally seen as too ambitious a goal, given the diversity of educational systems, labour markets and types of institutions involved in them. In the reports, it is also frequently noted that pupils and teaching personnel might view new developments as welcome innovations, but not perceive them as originating from an EU initiative.

5.4   Transversal issues

Taking the reports together, the dominant transversal Community policies during Socrates II and Leonardo II appear to have been the promotion of equality between women and men, the integration of disabled persons, the promotion of social and economic cohesion, the fight against racism, the education of adults who have not completed basic education, the inclusion of the older people and active citizenship. These transversal issues were most frequently addressed in the Grundtvig programme, although they were often also included in the project objectives of the other programmes.

Most countries also indicated that the priorities of the programmes in these areas corresponded well with the goals of national education policies as these are all important issues in policy making. The implementation of these EU transversal policies has in this way significantly strengthened national policies. This was especially the case in Eastern EU countries such as Bulgaria and Romania and also in Turkey. Through national policies, localities with poor socio-economic conditions and a high concentration of unemployed people were targeted and it was in these areas that the EU programmes have been taken up and have significantly strengthened these national policies.

As requested, all countries reported on gender issues in relation to the Leonardo programme and all, without exception, indicated that the objective of equal opportunities between men and women had been reached within the programme. However, some countries (most notably Germany and the UK) indicated that in the Leonardo programme at this point women were (somewhat) overrepresented and expressed their wish that actions should be taken to include more men in (mobility) projects.

Judging from the evidence presented in the country reports both programmes appear to have been accessible to disabled people, and open to all ethnic groups and both genders.

5.5   Good practices identified by Member States

For this section a number of good practices have been searched for in the National Reports that would detail what the national authorities and agencies did to manage the programme, help the beneficiaries, etc. In reviewing the reports our main finding is that the National Agencies successfully adhered to the procedures, very few would appear to perform exceptionally good (or bad for that matter). There are recommendations made, however, especially in the Danish and UK reports that might enable National Agencies to develop better practices in this respect.

At the centre of these recommendations is the establishment of a Customer Relations Management System. This system, similar to client management systems in industry, would ensure the systematic and consequent registry of applications, grants and background data. This would serve three purposes: (a) to ensure easy access to uniform input and output details on programmes and actions; (b) to be able to get informed about the specific use of the individual actions by the various types of institutes / individuals as well as the exact number of repeat applicants and (c) to use this information for targeted information campaigns towards areas with few applicants or many unsuccessful applicants, knowledge on who applied and knowledge of who to target with information meetings, invitations to individual institutions etc.. National Agencies predominantly indicate they lack systematic information to make considered decisions related to these issues.

5.6   Recommendations made by Member States

Countries made a number of recommendations and interestingly they appeared to be concerned with a very similar range of issues as discussed in this synthesis, the most common being as follows:

- In terms of the pilot projects, partnerships and network projects in the programmes (thus all projects except mobility), countries indicated the desire for more investment in order to magnify the effects of the projects. For instance, in the case of a project addressing the development of a new curriculum, the possibility to acquire supporting machinery, facilities or other learning tools would greatly enhance the impact of the project and would contribute to the real implementation of the project results. It was also highlighted that participants need greater clarity regarding the intellectual property rights related to products produced.

- Member States should benefit more from the programmes by utilising the potential of the National Agencies to a greater extent. To be able to do this National Agencies are in need of a clearer mandate and their influence on national policy making should be increased, but they also need to be provided with the necessary information, particularly from the EU level. An important task for the National Agencies could be to develop a strategy for better integration of the programmes into national educational policy. This recommendation was only suggested in the Norwegian report, but as in all reports the National Agencies are seen as expressing a wish for more control, it would seem that this recommendation will readily be adopted by the other Member States as well.

- Centralised activities did not provide sufficient linkages for contact and the exchange of information between participants in the centralised actions on one side and the National Agency and ministries on the other. National ministries could play a role in this, as they could also consider ways of improving the exchange of information between the EU and the National Agencies.

- In almost all the country reports it was suggested that a Customer Relations Management System should be established by National Agencies, to ensure the systematic and consequent registry of applications, grants and background data. It was believed that this would not only ensure easy access to uniform input and output details on programmes and actions, but would allow the National Agency to extract information on the use of the individual actions by the various types of schools, numbers of repeat applicants, background information etc.

- All reports indicated that a more extensive range of external stakeholders should be engaged. It would concern stakeholders having an influence at a national/systems level and who would therefore have the potential to drive forward any new policies. Stakeholders are to be engaged by project promoters and national agencies and have a strong link with national policy.

- The new programme should embrace the best features of the administrative culture of the previous programmes. The contribution and experience of the

National Agencies in administering decentralized measures should be taken into account and used in future programmes.

6 Conclusions

The major conclusions of this synthesis are as follows:

- The vast majority of the countries report an increase in the number of those benefiting from the mobility tracks in the Socrates II and the Leonardo da Vinci II programmes. There are exceptions to this, however. In the UK and Sweden, for instance, the number of Erasmus students has decreased, while the number of Erasmus students in Denmark has remained stable over time. The National Reports concerned do not provide any additional analyses explaining these phenomena.

- In a number of reports (from Dutch and French speaking Belgium, Germany, Luxemburg and Norway) it is indicated that despite the fact that the number of learners engaged in mobility activity has increased, their share of the total volume of eligible beneficiaries that participated in the programmes up to 2006 remains low. Obstacles appearing to prevent more mobility from occurring are lack of communication between beneficiaries (and stakeholders), sustainability of quality companies for placements; transparency of qualifications, the fact that employers do not see advantages, the fact that institutions do no have a strategy on international mobility, that the benefits are not clear and cultural differences.

- All reports, without any exception, indicate that the mobility dimension of the programmes had a (very) significant impact at the participant level. As a general rule, improvements were reported in: soft skills (communication skills, self confidence, self awareness and the ability to work with others), language competencies, cultural awareness and professional competencies.

- Countries generally reported that the programmes did effect positive change at the institutional level. The impact of the programmes tended to be rather insubstantial at the national / political level, however, although most reports did indicate there were isolated successful exceptions to this general rule. The reports also point to the fact that the activities supported by the programmes interrelated with other relevant processes of change within countries. This fact makes it difficult to partial out the effects of the programmes from the effects of national policies/developments in education. The most significant benefit mentioned in the country reports is that the programmes facilitated the cooperation of organisations from different countries working towards a joint goal in a way that would not otherwise have occurred.

- Most countries indicated that the priorities of the programmes corresponded well with the goals of national education policies as these are all important issues in policy making. The implementation of the EU transversal policies has in this way

significantly strengthened national policies. This was especially the case in Eastern EU countries such as Bulgaria and Romania and also in Turkey. Transversal policies concerned promotion of equality between women and men, the integration of disabled persons, the promotion of social and economic cohesion, the fight against racism, the education of adults who have not completed basic education, the inclusion of the older people and active citizenship.

- Most countries take the view that more flexibility and decentralization (financial) in the administration of the programmes would improve their reach and impact.

- In a number of country reports it was suggested that a Customer Relations Management System should be established by National Agencies, to ensure the systematic and consequent registry of applications, grants and background data. This information could then be used for targeted information campaigns towards areas with few applicants or many unsuccessful applicants, knowledge on who applied and knowledge of who to target with information meetings, invitations to individual institutions etc. National Agencies predominantly indicate they lack systematic information to make studied decisions related to these issues.