
Mid-term Evaluation of the Decision of
the Council 1999/51/EC on the
promotion of European Pathways for
work-linked training, including
apprenticeship (“EUROPASS-
Training”)

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EUROPA

An Executive Summary to the Directorate General Education
and Culture of the European Commission

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EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

ECOTEC Research and Consulting Limited were commissioned by the European Commission to carry out the mid-term evaluation of the EUROPASS Training initiative, on the promotion of European pathways for work-linked training, including apprenticeship.

The research aimed to evaluate the initiative's appropriateness, management and implementation and impact -including achievement of its objectives.

The main information collection tools used were:

- a survey sent to 899 participant organisations. The survey was replied to by 95 organisations. Ninety two questionnaires were suitable for processing,
- nineteen in-depth interviews with National Contact Points for the initiative (NCPs),
- a data grid to NCPs covering quantitative aspects of EUROPASS Training at national level,
- three in-depth interviews with national experts,
- nineteen case studies exploring best practice examples,
- evaluation of available secondary data and
- attendance of meetings at DG Education and Culture (DGEAC) with the participation of educational experts, representatives of various stakeholder groups and DGEAC personnel.

Although a survey of participant individuals was envisaged for this evaluation, this could not be undertaken. This imposed some constraints to this mid-term evaluation.

Evaluation findings

EUROPASS Training appropriateness

Extent to which operational objectives are consistent with operational tools

A set of operational tools has been set up to fulfil EUROPASS Training operational objectives:

Table 1 : EUROPASS Training's Operational objectives and operational tools

Operational objective	Operational tool
Establishing implementation mechanisms at national level in the framework of a co-ordinated approach at European level	NCPs established in all participant countries. Commission retains co-ordinating role
Setting up a system for co-ordination of information	Four meetings for exchange of information organised by the Commission Informal contacts between the Commission and NCPs and between NCPs themselves
Promoting the initiative	Dissemination materials have been produced and distributed at European, national and sub-national level
Production and distribution of the “EUROPASS Training documents”	The Commission produced EUROPASS Training documents, which are distributed by NCPs
Ensuring the quality of the European pathways	NCPs and participant organisations are in charge of ensuring quality of European pathways certified by EUROPASS Training; co-lateral quality assurance through LEONARDO for many pathways

Source: ECOTEC Research and Consulting Ltd

All operational objectives have been therefore covered by operational tools. In our opinion, all operational tools established are consistent with the operational objectives set out for it.

EUROPASS Training consistency with the policy developments in the field of lifelong learning, particularly in relation to transparency and transferability of qualifications and skills

There is currently a political momentum regarding the need to improve transparency tools. Although successful and widely used in some cases, according to our survey to participant organisations, existing instruments and services supporting transparency of qualifications are not sufficiently visible and accessible to citizens, who consider the current situation for transparency tools too complex. Several NCPs and national experts suggested different ways in which these deficiencies could be addressed. In many of these, EUROPASS Training would play a very important role. This emphasises the consistency of EUROPASS Training with policy developments in the area of transparency of qualifications and competences and the relevance of EUROPASS Training for these future developments.

Relevance of EUROPASS Training’s specific objective

The specific objective for EUROPASS Training is the promotion of periods of transnational mobility within work-linked training. Sixty percent of the respondents to our survey of participant organisations said that EUROPASS Training should certify work linked training, 77% that it should be expanded to certify all *skills* acquired abroad and 67% that it could be expanded to certify all *training* abroad. It is therefore not clear that EUROPASS Training specific objective should continue unchanged, and consideration should be given to extending the initiative’s objective to the promotion of periods of transnational mobility within alternative learning environments.

EUROPASS Training management and implementation

Clarity of the specific and operational objectives

All NCPs reported their understanding of the specific and operational objectives of the initiative as adequate, and they pointed out that this understanding had been necessary for the production of national guidelines. They were less sure about the understanding of the initiative by its users, especially regarding the initiative's rationale and operational framework. Participant organisations, however, reported having a good understanding of the initiative. Eighty percent of the respondents of our survey of participants declared having a clear or very clear understanding of the objectives of EUROPASS Training.

Territorial dimension

Management of the EUROPASS Training initiative is decentralised to the national level in participant countries, with the Commission retaining a co-ordinating role. Some countries have decentralised the management structure for the initiative further to sub-national level. A majority of NCPs considered that this decentralised structure was effective and efficient. The rationale for decentralisation is clear in that the quality control on European pathways can only be done at national or regional level and the territorial management of the initiative should continue unchanged.

Management in practice

There are several actors involved in the management of EUROPASS Training. The European Commission has a primarily contractual involvement in the initiative, with some responsibility for European level promotion, development and evaluation, as well as the production of the EUROPASS Training documents. The day to day management of the initiative is the responsibility of National Contact Points, an arrangement that both the Commission and NCPs favour. Stakeholders and social partners may also be involved in the management of the initiative through Steering Committees, and they have a more active role in some countries, like Germany. Sending and host organisations and beneficiaries are rarely involved in the management of EUROPASS Training, other than by submitting applications (sending organisations) and being represented in fora where EUROPASS Training is discussed. The management of EUROPASS Training in practice is generally regarded as a merely functional role which NCPs perform alone, albeit with some involvement of a wider range of actors.

Resources

NCPs often manage EUROPASS Training alongside existing mobility programmes and EUROPASS Training is not considered to be an onerous initiative to manage in terms of human resources or finance given its current volume of activity. If the initiative is to be expanded and take-up and dissemination increased, resource implications will have to be taken into account.

Efficiency in the use of resources

The budget for the EUROPASS Training initiative was set at 7.3 million ECU for the period 1 January 2,000/ 31 December 2004. The initiative has been efficient in its use of resources. It has already reached over 34,000 participants, what suggests that cost per awarded EUROPASS Training will be within reasonable margins by the end of 2004.

The EUROPASS Training document has been an efficient transparency mechanism. Eighty-five percent of the organisations surveyed during this evaluation considered the information contained in the EUROPASS Training document as useful or very useful. Several potential improvements were, nevertheless, highlighted during the evaluation process. In particular, the availability of an electronic version and further specification of the content of the document were deemed necessary by NCPs. Participant organisations supported similar developments less strongly.

EUROPASS Training impact

Global objectives

EUROPASS Training aims to fulfil five global objectives. The views of NCPs and participant organisations on the impact of EUROPASS Training regarding these objectives are summarised below.

Table 2: Views of participant organisations and NCPs on the impact of EUROPASS Training in its global objectives

	Participant organisations	NCPs
To improve the employment prospects of young people	+	+
To encourage the development of effective links between training and work experience	++	+ -
To promote the mobility of persons in training	+ -	+ -
To promote the transparency of vocational certificates and	+	++
To improve the quality and attractiveness of vocational education and training.	+	+ -

Source: ECOTEC Research and Consulting Ltd

Key: (++) Very positive impact; (+) positive impact; (+-) no positive impact perceived

EUROPASS Training has had its greatest impact in improving the transparency of training periods abroad. It has filled a vacuum that existed in the pre-2000 situation and both participant organisations and especially NCPs considered that it has been successful in this respect. Participant organisations in particular were very positive about the effect of EUROPASS Training in improving links between training and work experience, and the quality and attractiveness of vocational education and training. Both participant organisations and NCPs considered that EUROPASS Training improves the employment prospects of beneficiaries, although this benefit must be tempered by the lack of knowledge of the initiative by employers. By contrast, promotion of mobility of persons in training is the objective that EUROPASS Training has achieved the least. It is considered that EUROPASS Training is an addendum to

the benefits of mobility in training, but not an initiative that would encourage people in training to undertake a European pathway.

Specific Objective: EUROPASS Training participation

Over 34,000 EUROPASS Training applications had been approved from the initiative launch until October 2002, when this mid-term evaluation collected data on participation from NCPs. However, data available from NCPs covered this period only partially, mainly from the beginning of the initiative up to the end of 2001 or the first half of 2002, which suggests that the figure for approved applications might have already exceeded at least 40,000. This is a significant increase, of almost 80%, from November 2001, suggesting that the initiative is being increasingly recognised and used by potential beneficiaries.

Extent to which the outcome and results attain the operational objectives

The outputs of EUROPASS Training in attaining its operational objectives have been varied. The NCP network as implementation mechanism at national level and the mechanisms for production and distribution of the EUROPASS Training document have been widely successful. By contrast, the established system for the exchange of information and quality assurance mechanisms have been criticised by some NCPs during this evaluation. Finally, the instruments set up for promotion of the initiative have not disseminated EUROPASS Training as participants would have expected. Indeed, the survey to participant organisations highlighted that the main problem EUROPASS Training faces is that it is not well known by employers.

Complementary objectives:

Account of the specific needs of micro-enterprises, SMEs and the craft sector

EUROPASS Training has been used by micro-enterprises. According to the available information from NCPs around 5% of the EUROPASS Training users would have been self-employed people and a further 10% would be small organisations, between 2 and 49 employees. Moreover, our case studies present anecdotal evidence that the information provided by the EUROPASS Training document is useful for micro-enterprises, SMEs and the craft sector.

Equal opportunities

The take up of the initiative has represented a wide range of educational levels, age groups, economic sectors and has kept a gender balance, although no explicit equal opportunities policy has been developed for EUROPASS Training.

Conclusions

The EUROPASS Training initiative has been relatively successful in a variety of aspects during its first years and has established the basis for future progress in the area of transparency of qualifications. EUROPASS Training has, in its brief period of existence, confirmed itself as an important transparency tool, which is valued by its users. EUROPASS Training is also fulfilling to a large extent the objectives that were set for it at the outset of the initiative.

Different stakeholders have identified both the continuing relevance but also the need for reform of the initiative. It is seen as an appropriate and relevant tool to achieve the objectives it was set. However, there are also constraints on EUROPASS Training and shortcomings in relation to both the document itself and the initiative, in the current policy context.

In fact, the modest character of the initiative in its current form is one of the challenges that it has for the future. EUROPASS Training is considered by NCPs and participant organisations to be a useful tool and first step in the certification of skills acquired abroad, but it is also clear that these same actors believe that EUROPASS Training should be expanded. The opinion of the majority of stakeholders is that if the initiative is to achieve its potential, important changes will be needed in the future. This might require changes not only in the format of the present document, as previous analysis to this mid-term evaluation has suggested, but also in relation to the rationale of the initiative. In this respect, potential improvements of the initiative, opening new possibilities in terms of both the format of the EUROPASS Training document and its content, have been presented during this evaluation. In particular, the need for an electronic version of the document, further specification of its contents, integrating the initiative better with other transparency tools and extending the initiative beyond work-linked training to encompass all training undertaken abroad should be considered in the short term.