



INDIVIDUAL PUPIL MOBILITY PROJECT

FINAL REPORT

(submitted 10/10/2008)

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1. Introduction

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

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

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

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

2. Executive summary

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

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

2.1 Introduction

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

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

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

The pilot project consisted of three consecutive parts:

1. Study phase

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

Target groups:

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

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

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

Methodology:

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

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

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

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

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

70 Mobility providers of study abroad programmes answered the questionnaire.

- Schools: questionnaire

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

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

- Associations of relevance: (questionnaire + interviews)

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

2. Recommendation phase

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

3. Mobility phase

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

Eligible institutions:

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

Eligible pupils:

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

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

2.2 The general legislative framework for educational mobility in Europe

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

2.2.1 For outgoing pupils

Allowing an interruption of their schooling

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

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

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

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

Recognising academic achievements acquired abroad

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

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

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

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

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

Mobility in practice

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

2.2.2 For incoming pupils

Allowing foreign pupils to attend schools at home

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

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

Recognition of academic achievements acquired by foreign pupils during an exchange

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

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

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

2.2.3 The protection of minors

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

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

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

2.3 Educational mobility in Europe – the experience of the schools

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

European Commission introduced the European Quality Charter for Mobility.

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

2.6 Educational Mobility in Europe – financial aspects

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

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

2.7 Educational mobility in Europe – existing research and statistics

2.7.1 Statistics

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

2.7.2 Research

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

Benefits of exchanges

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

individual mobility programme, can be summarised as follows:

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

Common obstacles to educational exchanges

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

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

2.8 The pilot exchange

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

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

2.8.1 The milestones of the pilot exchange

The preparatory phase

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

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

Application phase: pre-call and call for applicants

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

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

Screening and selection of host families

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

Pre-departure training

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

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

2.8.2. Other services in support of the pilot exchange

Travel co-ordination

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

Contractual arrangements and grant management

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

2.9 The evaluation of the pilot exchange

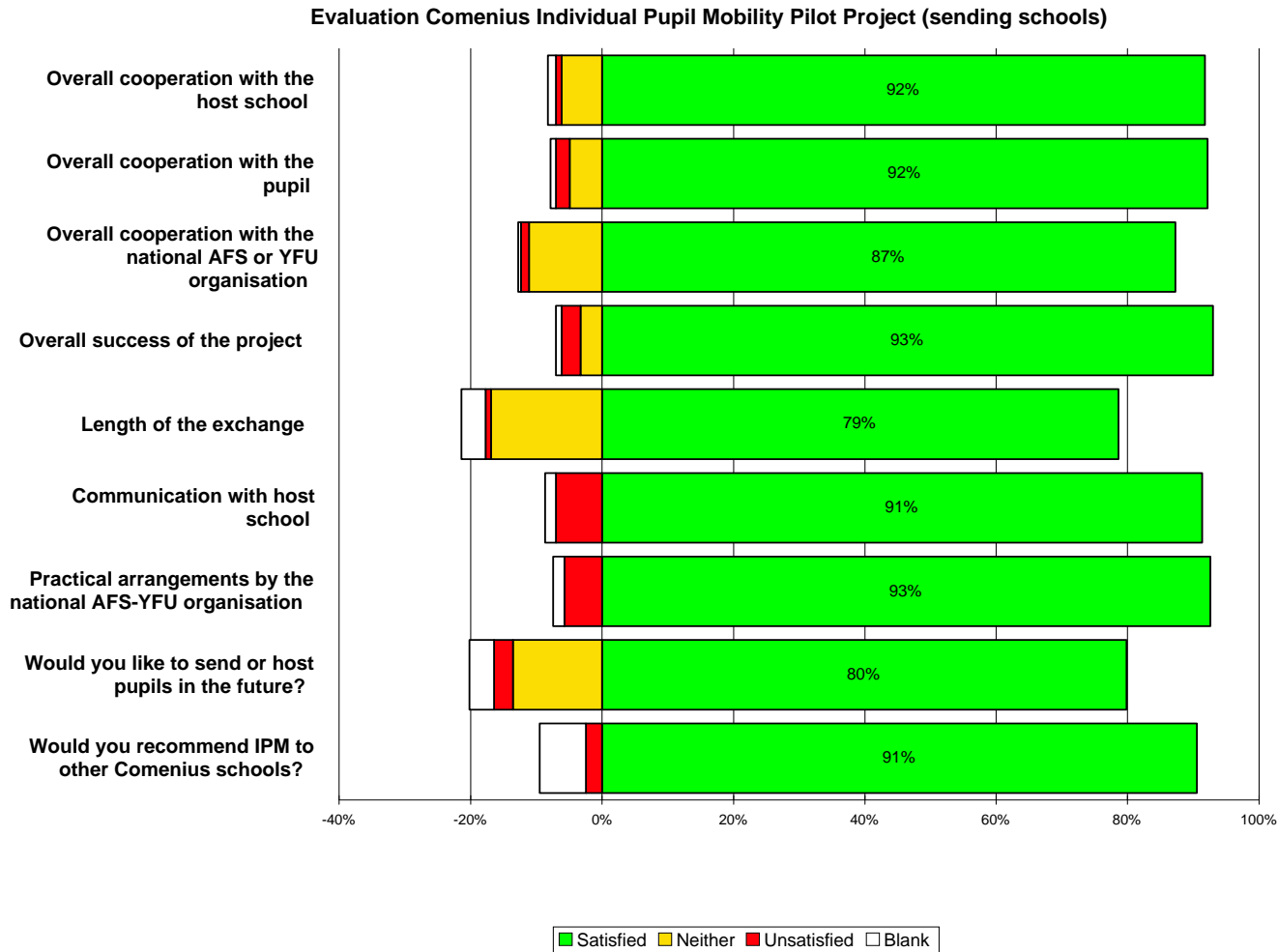
In order to formulate recommendations for the future individual mobility in the framework of the COMENIUS programme, evaluations of the test phase involving the exchange of 294 pupils between 10 European countries were conducted both by EFIL and an external expert, Dr. Søren Kristensen from Techne (Denmark).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

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

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

2.9.1 Evaluation of the operational aspects of the pilot exchange

Evaluation by the schools



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

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

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

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

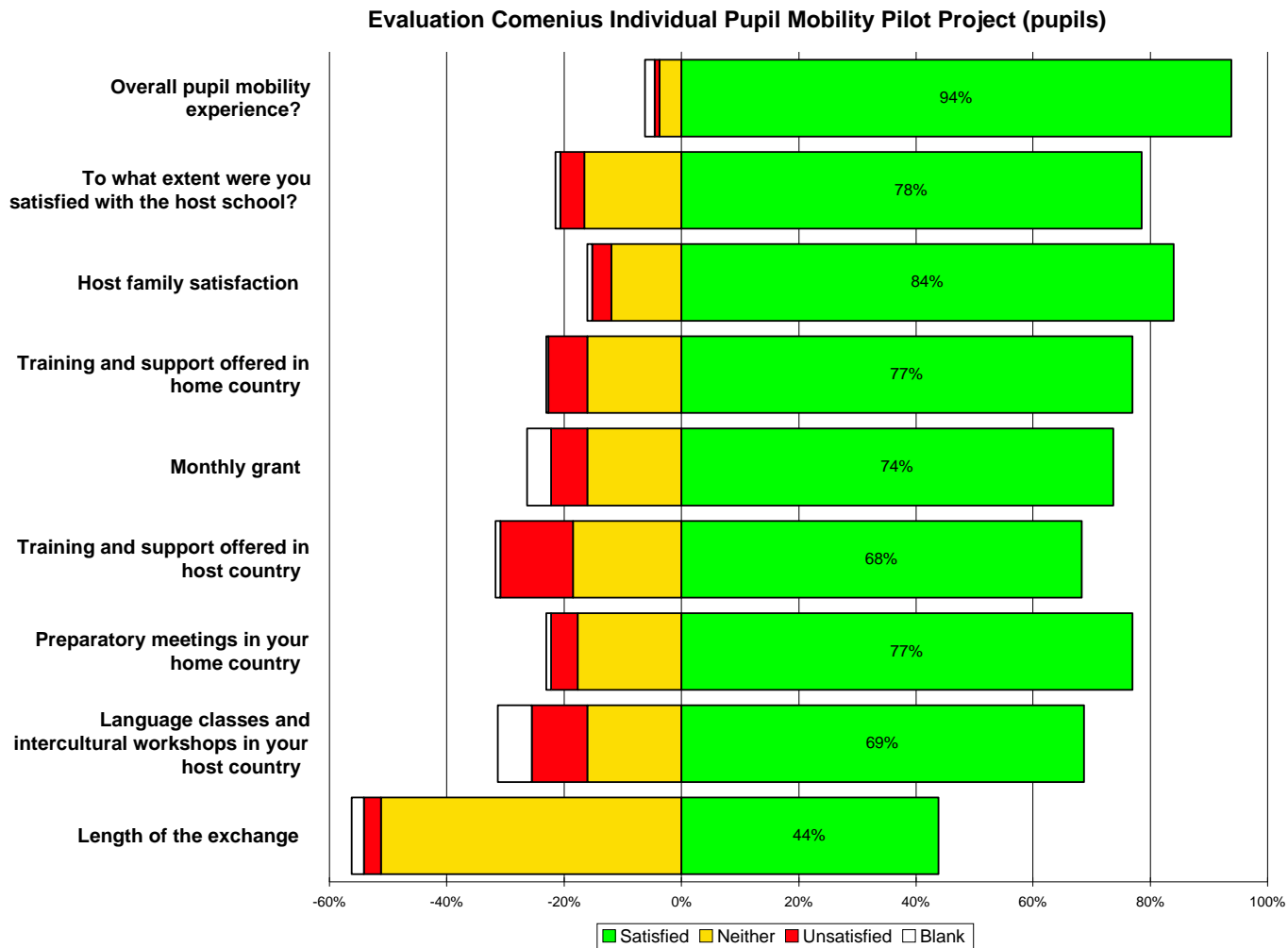
In relation to the academic aspects of the exchange, the host schools mentioned the following problems while acknowledging that the learning outcomes in other areas more than counterbalanced any lacunae in academic learning caused by these differences:

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

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

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

Evaluation by the pupils



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

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

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

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

Adjustment and integration problems faced by pupils

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

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

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

2.9.2 Evaluation of the pedagogical quality assurance of the pilot exchange

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

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

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

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

Evaluation of what took place before the exchange

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

Evaluations of what took place during the stay abroad

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

Evaluation of what took place after the stay abroad

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

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

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

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

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

2.10.1 Problems associated with the pilot

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

2.10.2 Structural problems

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

- the special circumstances of exchanging minors.

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

¹ Dr. Søren Kristensen, Techne (Denmark)

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

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

2. Guaranteeing an equitable access to the programme

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

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

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

3. Guaranteeing objectivity in the selection and support of pupils

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

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

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

4. Guaranteeing an appropriate preparation of the pupils

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

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

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

5. Ensuring appropriate insurance covering health and other risks

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

8. Ensuring appropriate accreditation and valorisation of the programme

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

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

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

2.12.2 Recommendations on the core content of training and support

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

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

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

Survival orientation

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

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

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

Language training

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

Intercultural orientation

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

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

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

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

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

Final evaluation

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

Post-return orientation and evaluation

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

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

C) Training for host families

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

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

D) Training for sending families

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

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

E) Training for hosting schools

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

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

2.12.3 Recommendation on the support structure

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

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

On the hosting side

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

On the sending side

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

2.12.4 Charter of Rights to establish roles and responsibilities

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

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

2.13 Conclusions

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

3. The current pupil mobility situation

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

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

3.1 Regulatory frameworks affecting pupil mobility

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

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

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

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

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

3.2 Experience of schools with mobility projects

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

3.3 Experience of Mobility Providers

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

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

3.4 Research and Statistics

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

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

3.5 Other stakeholders

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

² Dr. Søren Kristensen, Techne (Denmark)

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

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

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

We recommend:

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

4.2 Guaranteeing an equitable access to the programme

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

We recommend:

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

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

4.3 Guaranteeing an even level of support

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

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

4.4 Guaranteeing objectivity in the selection and support of pupils

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

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

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

4.5 Guaranteeing appropriate preparation of the pupils

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

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

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

4.6 Ensuring an appropriate health insurance

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

4.9 Ensuring appropriate accreditation and valorisation of the programme

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

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

5. Preparation of the exchanges

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

5.1 Different actors

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

5.2 Application process

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

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

Eligible institutions:

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

Eligible pupils:

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

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

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

5.3 Selection of pupils

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

All pupils were screened on the following criteria:

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

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

5.4 Host family search

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

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

5.5 Pre-departure training

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

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

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

5.6 Administration of the pilot

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

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

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

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

6. Pilot implementation

6.1 General overview

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

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

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

Table 1 - Overview participants at the start of the pilot

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

Table 2 - Overview participants at the end of the pilot

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

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

6.2 Trainings

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

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

6.3 Obstacles encountered during exchange phase

6.3.1 Non-completion of the exchange

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

6.3.2 Host family issues

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

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

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

6.3.3 Medical urgencies

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

6.3.4 Administration & Procedures

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

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

6.3.5 Communication & Information flow

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

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

7. Evaluation of the exchange scheme

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

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

7.1 Evaluation by the schools

7.1.1 Overall evaluation

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

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

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

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

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

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

7.1.2 Cooperation with the partner school

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

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

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

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

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

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

7.1.3 Cooperation between the sending school and the pupils

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

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

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

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

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

7.1.4 Cooperation with the intermediary organisations

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

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

Evaluation of the administrative cooperation

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

7.1.5 Recommendations made by the schools

Recommendations on the timeframe prior to the exchange

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

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

Recommendation on the co-ordination of the exchanges

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

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

Recommendations on the administrative aspects of the exchange

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

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

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

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

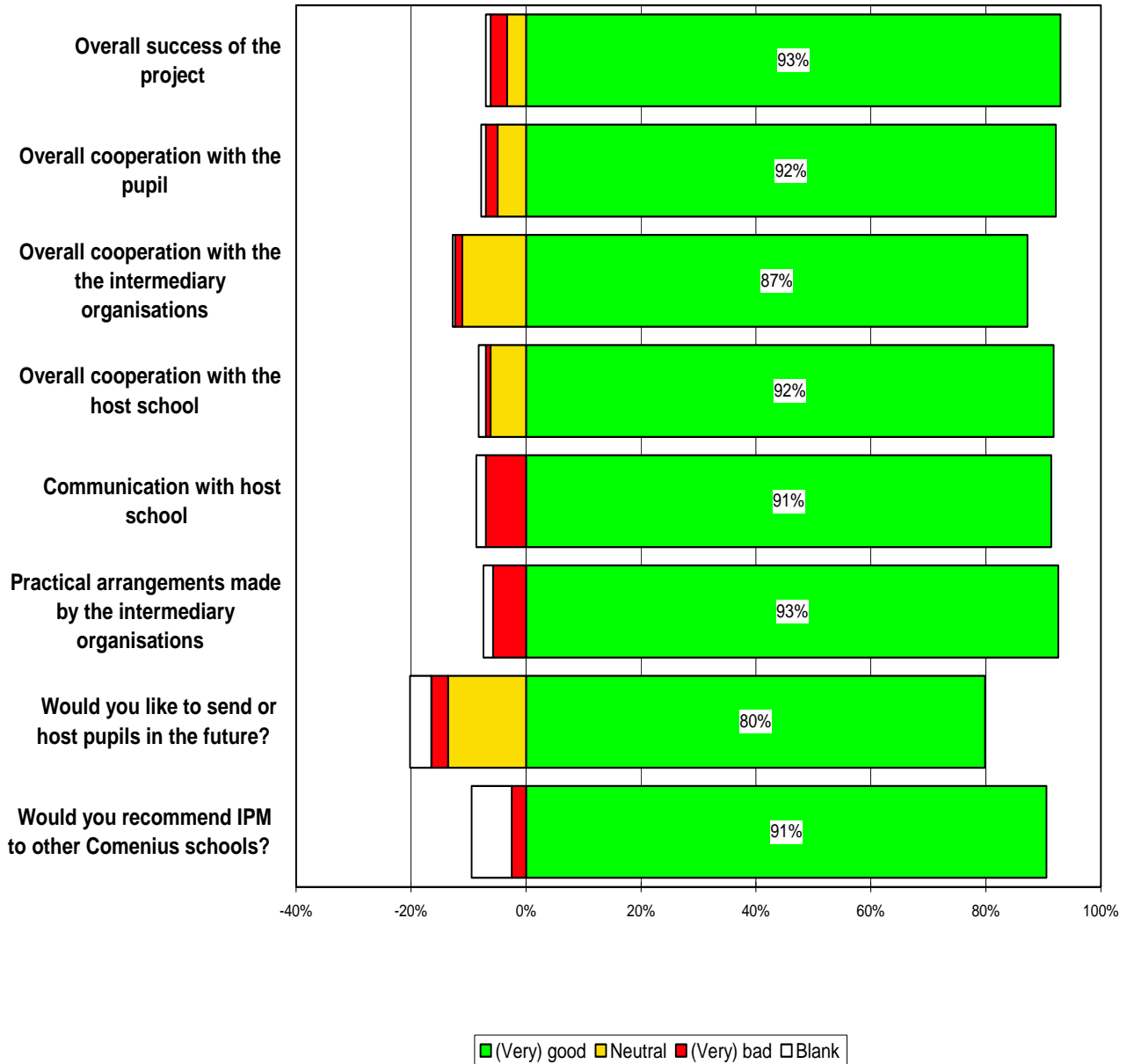
Recommendations on financial aspects

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

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

7.1.6 Statistics

Evaluation Comenius Individual Pupil Mobility Pilot Project (sending schools)



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

7.2 Evaluation by the pupils

7.2.1 Overall evaluation

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

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

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

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

7.2.2 Evaluation of the academic experience

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

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

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

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

7.2.3 Evaluation of the host family experience

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

7.2.5 Self-assessment of the pupils

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

Personality

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

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

Perception of the host country

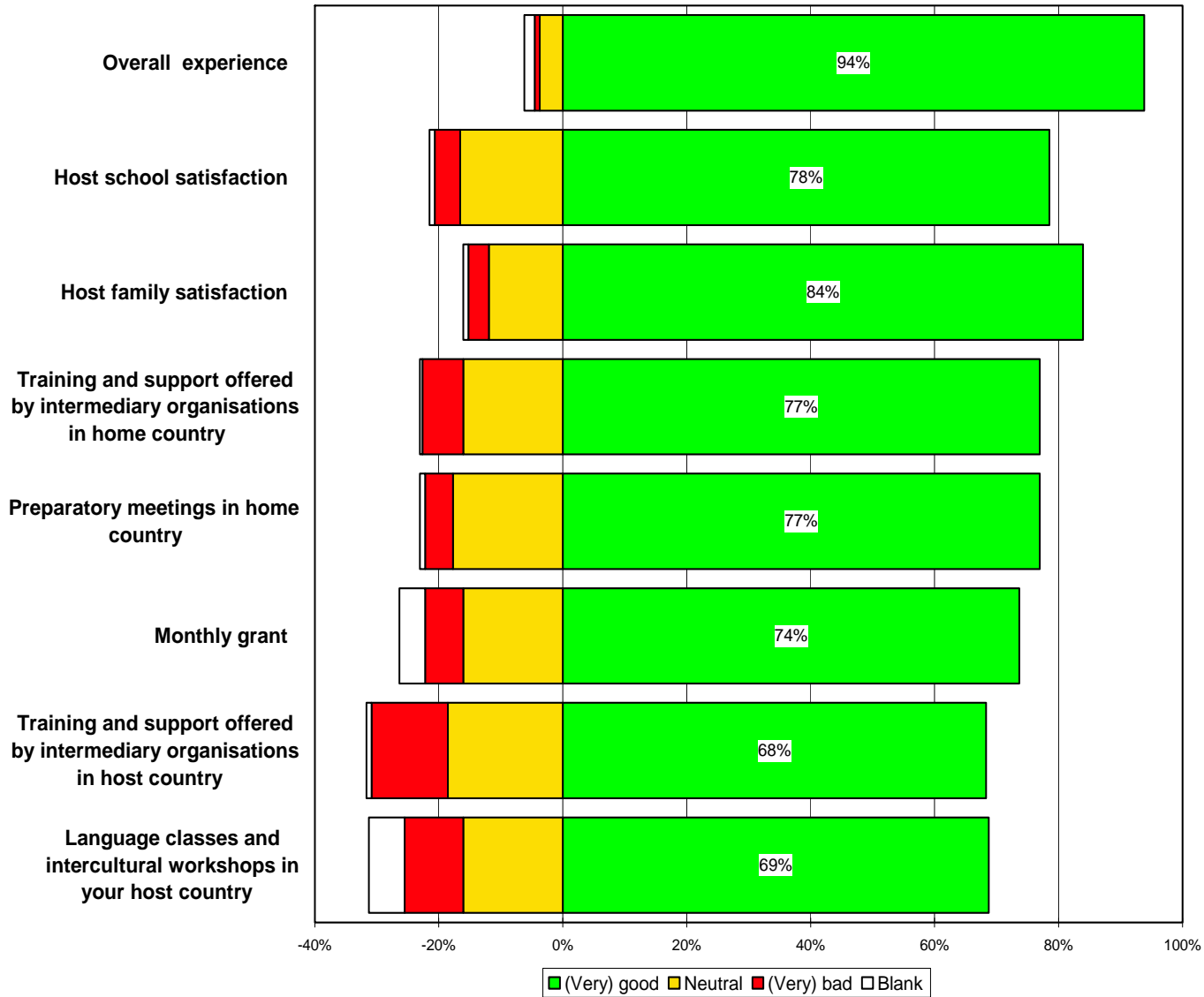
When asked about their perception of the host country, most pupils state a better understanding of the local culture and the experience of different traditions. A higher tolerance towards these differences is often mentioned too.

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

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

7.2.6 Statistics

Evaluation Comenius Individual Pupil Mobility Pilot Project (pupils)



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

Techne

Evaluation of the Comenius individual pupil mobility pilot project

May 28, 2008

Søren Kristensen, Ph.D
Techne

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i. EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

ii. DECLARATION

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

Copenhagen, May 28, 2008

Søren Kristensen, Ph.D.
External evaluator

1. PURPOSE AND NATURE OF THE EVALUATION

The terms of reference (ToR) for the Comenius individual pupil mobility project are not very loquacious about the evaluation, but merely mention that the contractor must carry out “an evaluation of the pilot scheme”² as part of the reporting requirements. It is clear, however, that the evaluation should only concern the test phase – i.e. actual exchanges – and not the full project, which also comprises an analysis of the current European context for individual pupil mobility at secondary school level as well as a set of recommendations for the implementation of individual pupil exchanges (to be submitted before the test phase). The results of the evaluation should then be used to revise the recommendations on the practical implementation of future mobility activities as an integral part of the Comenius programme.

Consequently, the evaluation is NOT

- a study of general scientific interest about the learning outcomes of transnational mobility in secondary schools;
- an assessment of the performance of EFIL and the pilot coordinators from AFS/YFU in relation to their contractual obligations.

Likewise, it is not a primary concern of the evaluation to pass judgement on the test phase as a practical exercise in shifting people across borders in Europe. The fact that 100, 1000 or even 10.000 young people go to another country, spend some time there and return safely, is not in itself an achievement in a pedagogical context: what really matters is what they bring back with them in terms of learning, which they can put to use in their educational careers, on the labour market, and in their personal and civic life. The main focus of the evaluation is therefore on the pedagogical interventions (“examples of good practice”) that can help pupils exploit the full learning potential of the stay abroad, and on the identification of barriers encountered along the way which have impeded them in drawing the full benefit of the experience. In connection with the “examples of good practice”, a key question is *transferability*: to what extent can they be adapted for use by other actors, or in other environments? Practical issues do, of course, also enter the picture, but primarily as a necessary adjunct to issues of pedagogical concern.

Identifying and describing barriers and successful pedagogical interventions is basically a qualitative exercise, and quantitative methods have only played a limited role in this evaluation. In a pilot project, much important information can only be elicited with extraction tools using narrative techniques (open-ended questions, semi-structured interviews). A piece of information may only appear in few statements out of several hundred and consequently have no statistical underpinning, and yet be crucial in the evaluation context. In order to

² Terms of Reference, p. 3

enable the evaluator to judge on the importance and relevance of such information, the evaluation must needs be guided by a comprehensive theoretical framework.

2. STRUCTURE OF THE REPORT

The report basically falls in three parts:

- A *general, introductory part* consisting of the sections 1 (Purpose and nature of the evaluation), 2 (Structure of the report), 3 (Data sources and extraction methods), and 4 (Theoretical framework for the evaluation);
- A part containing the *empirical findings*, consisting of the sections 5 (Overall assessment of project outcomes), 6 (Pedagogical quality assurance), and 7 (Practical quality assurance); and
- A part with *conclusions and recommendations*, consisting of section 8 (Conclusions and recommendations)

An annex contains some documents related to the evaluation.

2.1 Some notes on language

Throughout the report, the contractor (EFIL) and the national AFS and YFU organisations involved as pilot coordinators in the project are mentioned under one as “the intermediary organisations”, with the exception of cases where it is necessary to make a distinction.

All quotations in the report have been quoted verbatim; however, in a few cases I have as a matter of principle removed names and other information that have made a direct identification possible. Quotations in other languages than English have been translated by me. In the cases where it has happened, I have indicated this with a footnote.

3. DATA SOURCES AND EXTRACTION METHODS

The information for this evaluation study has been obtained from all actors in the implementation phase of the pilot project, with the exception of natural and hosting parents: the intermediary organisations (EFIL and EEE-YFU³, AFS/YFU pilot coordinators), hosting and sending schools, pupils). The data has been extracted using a mixture of quantitative and qualitative methods. Given the aim of the evaluation, qualitative data extraction methods have dominated the research phase.

3.1 Data sources and extraction

I have used the following methods of data extraction:

³ EEE-YFU (European Educational Exchange – YFU) is YFU’s European coordination organisation. EFIL (European Federation for Intercultural Learning) plays a similar role for the national AFS/Intercultura organisations in Europe.

Document analysis: All pertinent documentation (both background documents and documents relating to the implementation of the pilot project have been read and analysed for relevant content.

Participatory observation: I have participated in all EFIL steering committee meetings, in the end-of-stay seminar organised for the participants in France (February 1-2, 2008), and in the final meeting of the AFS/YFU pilot coordinators in Ittre (Belgium) on February 22-23, 2008.

Questionnaire surveys: I have conducted the following questionnaire surveys

- Semi-structured survey of AFS/YFU pilot coordinators (June 2007). Answers were received from 11 out of 12 pilot coordinators (no response from Hungary).
- Semi-structured survey of hosting schools (February/March 2008). The questionnaire was distributed to the hosting schools by the AFS/YFU coordinators. A total of 103 responses were received out of a total of 283 hosting schools (36%). All participating countries were represented in the responses, apart from Hungary.

Also, I have read and analysed the responses from the following surveys conducted by EFIL:

- *Survey of sending schools.* Prior to the distribution of the questionnaire, I was allowed to read it through and insert a few questions concerning topics of relevance to the external evaluation. At the time of writing this report, 203 out of 245 schools (83%) had already completed and returned the questionnaire.
- *Survey of participating pupils.* This survey was an annex to the questionnaire for the sending schools.

The questionnaires used for pilot coordinators and for hosting schools have been appended to this evaluation study in an annex.

Qualitative interviews: I carried out 7 interviews with hosting and sending schools in 4 countries (2 for Austria, 1 for Denmark, 2 for Germany and 2 for Finland). I selected the location, and the contact to the local schools was established by the intermediary organisations. One of the hosting schools had experienced a premature return of the visiting pupil. The interviewed person was in each case the teacher responsible for the coordination of the exchange. Each interview lasted app. 1 hour, and afterwards summaries of the main points were sent back for comments and verification.

During my participation in the final meeting of the pilot coordinators in Ittre in February 2008, I had informal talks with most pilot coordinators. At the end-of-stay seminar in Paris, I had the opportunity to speak to returning pupils. I also spoke to a returned pupil at one of the schools I interviewed.

3.2 Representativity, reliability and validity

A general issue in relation to these three aspects is connected with the use of qualitative methods, where significant information is not underpinned by statistical recurrence (e.g. “xx% of all schools consider...”). The interpretation of these are, of course, more problematic, and I have indicated this by using formulations like “seem to” or “appear to” rather than straightforward affirmative statements.

Specifically concerning representativity, I only achieved a 100% coverage of the “population” for the intermediary organisations: I have received information from EFIL/EEE-YFU and all the pilot coordinators involved. For sending schools, coverage reached nearly 84% and for hosting schools 36%. Both figures I deem satisfactory for this type of survey⁴, and as many schools double as sending and hosting schools, the overall coverage of the total school population in the pilot project was high⁵. The range of interviews was not meant to be representative of the project as a whole – they served to corroborate and deepen my understanding of issues that had appeared in the analysis of the questionnaires. For the participating pupils, I have read all pupil reports and had informal talks with a number of pupils at the end-of-stay seminar in Paris.

Concerning the issue of reliability, there is in principle the possibility that the intermediary organisations try to present their interventions in a better light in order to improve their chances of playing a role in future Comenius individual pupil mobility activities. As the information can be cross-checked with that of schools and pupils (and vice versa), however, there is a good chance of detecting any attempts at this. I do not have the impression that this happened.

In questionnaires – and especially questionnaires that are written in a foreign language and in some cases also must be filled in using a foreign language – the issue of validity must always be a concern of the researcher. In order to make sure that all relevant issues were covered, the questionnaires mainly consisted of open questions (e.g. “what were the main problems encountered?”). Some of the terms used in the questionnaires were to a certain extent open to interpretation – what is e.g. an “internationalisation strategy”, and what exactly are the content factors that determine whether a school has one or not? In cases where this was a possibility, I have used a follow-up question to probe the understanding of the respondent, or tested the understanding in the interviews. In the questionnaires for the hosting schools, respondents were given the possibility of using English, German, French, or Danish/Swedish.

4. THEORETICAL BACKGROUND FOR THE EVALUATION

In qualitative studies, the theoretical framework assumes a special importance, since this is the yardstick – rather than statistical recurrence – which is used to determine and measure the value of data. In this section, I have briefly described the theoretical tool I have used as a guide for structuring work with the evaluation study.

4.1 Mobility and learning theory

Learning does not take place automatically just by crossing a border. If it did, every business trip or holiday abroad would imply a learning process – a thing which is manifestly not the case. Transnational mobility in a context of education and training is essentially a pedagogical activity, and it needs to be correspondingly underpinned and supported, if learning is to take

⁴ The high return rate for sending schools is due to the fact that the questionnaire was part of the mandatory requirement for receiving any outstanding grant money.

⁵ Exactly how high cannot be ascertained, as hosting schools had the option of returning questionnaires anonymously, which some did.

place. Otherwise the outcome may be no learning at all – or even worse: negative learning, where the participant returns with a feeling of failure and defeat, and with prejudices confirmed rather than dispelled.

The question is then whether we can identify the factors that condition cognitive and affective learning – the mechanisms that need to be activated in order to achieve a positive outcome in this respect. I have for this evaluation study availed myself of a simplified version of a conceptual model already developed (Kristensen, 2004), which stipulates three learning conditions for transnational mobility projects:

Immersion: That participants must – to the highest degree possible - be surrounded by, and immersed in, culture and mentality of the host country;

Responsabilisation: That participants in so far as possible must cope themselves with the problems and challenges they encounter during the stay abroad;

Perspectivation: That participants must be given the time, space and support to reflect upon their experiences of diversity and disjuncture.

These learning conditions are to a certain extent self-explanatory. Foreign language proficiency and insight into a particular culture are arguably best learnt if the participant is integrated to the fullest extent possible into the host environment. Here, progress happens through a process of imitation and identification – what in learning theory is known as “legitimate peripheral participation” (Lave and Wenger, 1999). The effects of “standing on their own feet” and indeed “surviving” in a foreign culture, far away from the usual sources of advice and support (e.g. family or friends) means an enormous boost to self-confidence and self-reliance. Incidentally, the fact that the participants are away from their usual environment also means that they are free to experiment with aspects of their personality which do not normally come into play – they are no longer held in place by the expectations of others. The changes in personality resulting from this – as many exchange organisers and parents can testify - can be quite dramatic - cf. Schön’s concept of “free space” (Schön, 1987). Finally, the experience of diversity and disjuncture in relation to perfectly ordinary practices (e.g. family life, teaching styles, food etc.) challenges their perception of normality, and the ensuing reflections may – if properly nurtured and supported – lead to an understanding of own norms and values as ultimately culturally grounded, and hence to increased tolerance, acceptance of change, and capacity for innovative thinking. These developments are often described under the umbrella term “intercultural competences”, which is actually a misnomer, since they are equally valuable even if the participants were never to go abroad again. In terms of learning theory, this reflection progress is known as “accommodative learning” (Piaget, 2001, p 8-10), or “transformative learning” (Mezirow, 2000, p. 7-8).

We must, however, bear in mind that the three conditions are generic, i.e. developed to cover any type of “learning mobility”, and as such they are relative, and not absolute. They must be tailored to fit different types of projects and target groups – a 15-year old pupil obviously cannot undertake the same level of responsibility in relation to a (long-term) stay abroad than a 23-year old university student. Yet in principle, any pedagogic intervention must have as its aim to ensure that these conditions are experienced to the highest degree possible. In order to bring this about, pedagogical interventions are not only called for *during* the stay abroad, but

also *before* and *after*. In the *operationalisation* of these learning conditions, we should therefore relate them to these three phases.

In order to achieve a proper *immersion*, participants must be prepared beforehand, both linguistically and culturally. In terms of *responsibilisation*, they must be given the proper tools that enable them to tackle the challenges they encounter – both in relation to practical, psychological and pedagogical aspects. Also, they must be well selected, to ensure that they are well suited for the experience. During the stay, there must be help and assistance at hand, if problems threaten to get on top of the participant. Afterwards, the participants must be helped to verbalize their experiences and construct a framework for interpretation (*perspectivation*).

4.2 Operationalisation

If we further develop and refine the operational aspects of this conceptual model, we can for each phase (before, during, after) identify the specific pedagogical interventions that are required in order to achieve the sought after learning aims. These interventions – or intervention areas – is where the focus of the data collection exercise has been placed, and I have also used them to as the point of departure for the development of the structure of the study.

Before:

Recruitment: How is the target group informed about the possibility for participation in the exchange? To whom is the information disseminated?

Selection: Which criteria and procedures are used to select those that can participate?

Preparation: How are participants prepared for the experience?

- linguistically?
- culturally?
- practically?
- pedagogically?
- psychologically?

During:

Mentoring: Who follows the progress of the participant in terms of academic achievements and personal development? What methods are used for this?

Monitoring: What procedures are in place in the event of emergency situations (risk management)?

After:

Evaluation: How is the practical arrangement and the learning outcome evaluated?

Recognition: How is it ensured that the academic achievements obtained during the stay are integrated into the formal learning trajectory of the participant?

Perspectivation: In what way is the reflection process of the participants facilitated?

Retention: Are any efforts made to ensure that positive developments are retained after homecoming? What assistance is offered to help the participant act on new insights and competences acquired during the stay?

Reintegration: Is any assistance foreseen in the event of problems with reintegration upon homecoming?

Transnational mobility, however, is not only a matter of pedagogical interventions. A number of practical issues also play a role, more or less indirectly, in deciding the outcomes of a project. Most pertinent in this respect is perhaps the choice of *accommodation*, where the use of home stays (host families) as well as offering a supportive framework around the participating pupils' life outside of school, also provides a learning environment where pupils' linguistic proficiency and intercultural competences are developed. Other practical issues play a less prominent role. Besides accommodation, I have in this study focused on the following issues:

- Travel arrangements
- Grant management
- Insurance
- Liability
- Information flows
- Organisational issues

It is crucial to understand these pedagogical and practical aspects not as lists of disjointed items, but as coherent systems, where none of the parts can be seen in isolation, but must be coordinated and balanced with one another. "Quality in mobility" is only achievable if all aspects are covered. I have consequently in the following referred to these systems as the "pedagogical quality assurance system" and the "practical quality assurance system" respectively, and structured the part with the empirical findings accordingly.

5. OVERALL ASSESSMENT OF PROJECT OUTCOMES

As mentioned in the description of the aim and scope of the evaluation, this evaluation has the twin goal of locating possible barriers to the implementation of individual pupil mobility as an integral feature of the Comenius programme, and to identify the examples of good practice used in the pilot project and discuss their transferability. Before passing on to these, however, it is worthwhile to establish the major outcomes (or impact) of the project on the main beneficiaries: pupils and schools.

5.1 Impact on participating pupils

Participating pupils – as well as teachers both in the sending and hosting schools – are clear in their appreciation of the outcome of the experience. There is in practically all cases a significant improvement of foreign language proficiency, and many also try out different subjects and leisure time activities:

"My language skills have improved a lot. I also had a chance to become familiar with some school subjects that I'm not able to study in my own school in Finland" – (Finnish girl staying 3 months in Italy).

"I started doing judo as a complementary sports activity" (Italian girl staying 3 months in Germany).

But the most enthusiastic comments concern the personal development of the pupils. This development covers increased self-confidence, self-reliance, and insight into cultural differences:

“From the more personal point of view it has taught me to organise certain aspects of my life, things I had always left to my family to do, things like organising money and budgeting, and even simpler things, washing and ironing” (Italian girl staying 3 months in Germany).

“We could see that our girl who before this pilot project was very shy, is now talkative, confident and self-assured thanks to this new adventure” (Portuguese school/sending).

“I know something about myself that I have never known before. I can do everything. Nothing is impossible” (Italian girl staying 3 months in Germany).

“I think differently...I can evaluate (sic) difference. I can evaluate and appreciate my home country. From Germany, I got to know Hungary” (Hungarian girl staying 6 months in Germany).

In terms of academic achievements, the schools’ assessment of the outcome is less enthusiastic due to differences in curriculum, teaching methods, and in some cases also differences in age and academic levels. Indeed this aspect is one of the problematic features of this type of transnational mobility. However, generally schools agree that the learning outcomes in other areas more than counterbalance any lacunae in academic learning caused by these differences:

“The choice of subjects offered by the host school was in line with those studied in Italy, but did not always take into account the starting level of the student who, in some subjects found herself assigned to a higher level than was hers but did not receive support teaching and/or was not moved class. Thus although some of the subjects studied were nominally the same as those studied in Italy, it has been less easy to “import” them into the Italian curriculum, she will have to catch up as we are still in the first part of the school year. Overall, however, this is outweighed by the positive aspects of the experience for our student: the consistent use of a foreign language, coming into contact with other teaching methods having to adapt to them and the being able to compare them, the fact that every day brought new problems for her to solve and to learn from.” (Italian school/sending).

There are, of course, also examples of negative project outcomes for individual pupils, and the rate of premature returns (pupils braking off their stay before the stipulated date) is relatively high compared to the percentage of premature returns recorded in the ordinary programme activities of AFS (7,08% as opposed to 3,5%)⁶. There are also, however, examples of neutral or negative outcomes among those who completed the stay:

“In spite of a motivation for this experience which appeared to us as exemplary, she retreated into herself and closed herself off to all outside communication. This dynamism embedded itself in her personality, as if all motivation had disappeared. After the initial enthusiasm, and

⁶ Information received from EFIL

without us knowing really why, we witnessed a closing of the spirit, and she withdrew into her own universe...and adopted a role of “consumer-onlooker” – passive and critical” (French school/sending)

5.2 Organisational impact

For the sending schools, the main benefits recorded mostly deal with the achievements of the pupil who went abroad. For many hosting schools, however, the presence of the foreign pupil has had an impact on the immediate environment (pupils, teachers, parents). A number of statements from hosting schools identify the benefits of the stay:

“Austrian pupils had to be more tolerant and open minded towards their “guest student”, they talked English more than usual and got to know a lot about Finland, the life there, the school system...Also teachers had to adjust to the situation and got to know different aspects of school life” (Austrian school/hosting)

“The pupil in question came to master French very rapidly, in spite of her never having studied it before. The French pupils saw that it was possible, even with a minimum of intelligence but above all with a lot of motivation, to live in another European country and to become familiar with its language and customs in a limited period of time. This was a very instructive experience for them” (French school/hosting).

“A main benefit is that the “reticence” towards contact with countries from what was formerly known as the “Eastern block” diminished strongly in pupils, parents and colleagues; and finally resulted in an exchange with Hungary. Next year we will also exchange with Poland. The fact that contacts with these countries, which we in Germany still view with many prejudices, is now seen as unproblematic by pupils, parents and teachers, is an achievement for which our Hungarian exchange pupil can claim no little part” (German school/hosting)

“Pupils are looking for exchange now to other countries than only UK and US” (German school/hosting)

Organisational impact on the sending school is, as indicated above, less marked:

“...an IPM for only one student doesn’t affect school life in general” (Belgian school/sending)

For many (but not all) schools (both sending and hosting), participation in the Comenius individual pupil mobility project has furthermore meant that contacts with the Comenius partner school(s) have been maintained and intensified:

“Cooperation has been kept at a high level, and the project has helped to extend the existing good relations and personal contacts” (Austrian school/sending).

6. PEDAGOGICAL QUALITY ASSURANCE

I have used the term “pedagogical quality assurance” as a common denominator for all pedagogical interventions in a transnational mobility project. In the following, I have treated

each aspect separately, but it is important to underline that they hang together in a coherent system.

Before the stay abroad:

6.1 Recruitment

This aspect is concerned with how prospective participants are informed about the exchange, and how they are motivated to sign up for participation.

Recruitment is, of course, different from selection (see below): in an individual mobility scheme, the aim of recruitment is to create an adequate pool of candidates to select from. The recruitment phase is about disseminating the information about the possibility to the entire target group, to ensure that everybody is aware of the activity and the conditions for taking part. Motivation may also enter the recruitment phase as an integral and important part. Not all young people may immediately go for such an opportunity, and especially more timid and reticent characters may hold back, even though they perhaps stand to gain more from participation than more extrovert and adventuresome persons. For such persons an extra effort may be needed.

In the “Guidelines for applicants” (a document prepared by EFIL and sent to the schools in advance of the project), the requirements of the pupils in the pool submitted for final selection are defined as follows:

“Youngsters must have an open mind, a good sense of curiosity and be willing to broaden their horizons. A certain maturity is required, and a clear will to integrate into the local community and the local way of living is essential” (p. 9)

Recruitment in the Comenius individual mobility pilot project has been in the hands of the schools: they have had to ensure that the information about the possibility is spread among their pupils, and to encourage them to sign up for participation. They have done so in a variety of ways:

- by posting a message on the message board for all to see;
- by approaching those who they deemed particularly suited for the experience (demonstrating academic prowess, foreign language proficiency, personal competences – or pupils for whom they thought such an experience would be particularly helpful);
- by approaching those who had visited one of the possible hosting schools before as participants in a Comenius class-exchange;
- by approaching those who had previously expressed an interest in going abroad⁷.

The recruitment phase – especially if it also covers a motivational aspect – may take a long time, but in this project, there has only been a very short time available. Practically all schools complain about the tight deadlines for this. Many schools that were only hosting state that they might also have sent participants, if only there had been more time for the recruitment process. This makes it difficult to draw any lessons from the pilot project in this area, for in

⁷ Information mainly obtained from the interviews with schools

the future – when the possibilities for individual mobility has become embedded in the programme as an integral part – it will be possible for the schools to work with a more far-sighted strategy. In fact, it would seem that many schools have hardly implemented any recruitment procedure at all – they have gone straight to the selection process and targeted one or two pupils beforehand, rather than opening up for everybody in order to create a pool of interested and qualified pupils for the final selection.

6.2 Selection

Selection is an absolutely crucial process in a long-term individual mobility scheme for pupils in this age group. A long-term stay abroad contains an enormous learning potential, but it can also be a tough and stressful experience (in fact, a significant part of the learning potential resides in this). Being alone in a new environment without the usual sources of help and support (family, friends) demands a certain level of resourcefulness and resilience – if this is not there, the stay may end up with a negative learning outcome (e.g. prejudices confirmed and extended, rather than expelled) or the participant may return to his home country prematurely with a feeling of defeat and dejection. The ability to decide whether a potential participant is actually suitable for participation or not is therefore a key skill for an exchange coordinator – but also arguably one of the most complex and difficult tasks, which requires insight and experience to perform satisfactorily.

In the project, this selection procedure was the responsibility of the intermediary organisations (AFS or YFU). Selection took place at a weekend seminar before departure, where prospective participants were gathered in the home country⁸. On the basis of observation and interviews with the pupils recruited, AFS/YFU would then make the final selection about who could go and who couldn't. The selection criteria (as outlined in the “Guidelines for Applicants”) are the following:

- pupils must give evidence of a clear motivation for the exchange experience;
- a minimum level of maturity is expected;
- pupils should have the capacity to speak and understand the language of the host country and/or another widely used language.

Another criterion in the selection process was that only one pupil from a school could go to a specific hosting school – if a sending school wanted to send more than one pupil abroad, they needed to involve a proportionate number of hosting schools. This criterion is understandable (indeed laudable) in that it ensures that a pupil's immersion in the culture and mentality of the host country is absolute. There is little doubt, however, that this has complicated the selection process.

The immediately striking thing about the above selection criteria is their opaqueness – they are general and superficial, rather than operational and specific. How does a pupil “give evidence of a clear motivation”, and what is “a minimum level of maturity”? What degree of fluency is required in order to possess “a capacity to speak and understand the language of the host country”, and what qualifies as “another widely used language”? And are they all equally important, or are some more important than others? We are dealing with entities that are

⁸ This selection seminar also contained an important element of intercultural preparation – see below.

extremely difficult to quantify and “translate” into operational formula, and selectors must to a large extent rely on their experience and psychological insight (and indeed “fingerspitzengefühl”), when they apply them in a concrete situation. There are no simple test or sets of infallible rules that can be administered to judge on suitability. The criteria are relative, and moreover there is a complex interplay between them. There are e.g. in the school interviews examples of participants with very restricted foreign language proficiency at the onset who have yet managed to have a positive experience. In these cases, an openness of the spirit and a willingness to communicate have outweighed the initial lack of foreign language skills. Yet in other cases, the language problem has clearly influenced the outcome in a negative way to the extent that the value of the whole experience was jeopardised.

By leaving the final selection in the hands of the intermediary organisations, it was ensured that this process was carried out by experienced people who are well trained in this specific discipline. After all, selection of participants is a crucial element of the AFS/YFU exchanges, and selectors need to be sharp in order for the organisations to stay in what is a competitive market. This is indicated by the fact that the AFS/YFU in their school-exchange activities operate with an early return-rate of 3,5 %, which must be considered quite satisfactory, given that a number of early returns are due to “acts of god” (illness, accidents etc.) rather than e.g. deficiencies in the selection process. Yet in this project, the early return-rate was 7,08; i.e. double the normal figure. Of course we need to bear in mind that early returns are cannot be ascribed exclusively to selection procedures – a high number of early returns may also be caused by a number of other factors: e.g. insufficient preparation (once the participants have been selected), bad match of participants and host families, deficient accompaniment (monitoring/mentoring) etc.

I already indicated above that there was a certain mix-up between the recruitment and the selection procedures. Schools were supposed to supply a pool of likely candidates from which the intermediary organisations could then make the final selection, but in many cases the schools had actually already made the selection by offering the opportunity to a selected few only. Many schools complain that the very tight deadline made it extremely difficult to drum up candidates; that there was no time to spread the information about the opportunity and to motivate pupils to go for this. Therefore they had to resort to pinpointing a few likely candidates and work on them, presenting a “pool” of one or two candidates only for the final selection procedure. This “selection”, however, seems in many cases not to have been made exclusively according to the criteria used by the AFS/YFU-selectors. It would thus seem that for many schools, academic achievements has figured as a (if not the) paramount criterion for inclusion in the “pool”.

There is in the available literature on mobility (research, practitioners’ handbooks etc.) no support for the assumption that academic achievements in itself is a valid criterion for participant in a long-term exchange. Intellectual abilities are undoubtedly a plus, but academic achievements in the shape of good marks do not necessarily increase “survival chances” in a long-term transnational mobility project. Good marks is, of course, the way in which the educational system recognises and rewards “excellence”, but there is no reason to believe that the schools’ Comenius coordinators necessarily posited a directly proportional relationship between academic brilliance and the degree of fitness for participation in a long-term individual exchange project. Rather, it is a different kind of logic that drives the schools to target pupils with good marks as likely participants – namely the inability of the system in

many countries to recognise learning abroad. This means that many participants have had to tackle a “double curriculum” during the exchange, where they at the same time were supposed to follow lessons in the host schools and keep up with their class-mates at home so that they did not fall behind. Sending schools have thus organised weekly despatches of homework for the participant, and in the cases where tests/exams are organised during their absence, they have been required to sit these in the host school. In other cases, they have had to resit them upon homecoming. This is a very stressful experience, which requires academic brilliance and discipline to overcome. In their “selection”, it is likely that schools have given this criterion pre-eminence over the criteria used by the intermediary organisations. Conversely, academic excellence is not an important criterion for the AFS/YFU selectors, and the two selection processes can thus be said to have been at cross-purposes with one another.

One possible hypothesis to explain the higher early return-rate is thus that the elitist approach from many schools, coupled with the very tight deadline for recruitment, produced a very limited pool of candidates to select from, and this may have led AFS/YFU-selectors – consciously or unconsciously – to lower their standards and allow participants, which in a normal AFS/YFU-selection procedure would not have been approved. Otherwise the whole project might have been threatened with collapse, as the number of participants would have become too small. Originally, 650 participants were envisaged, but only 294 actually took part⁹. A further reduction may theoretically have prompted the Commission to cancel, as the amount did not constitute a “statistically significant” number.

Another hypothesis is that the pressure induced on participants by the demands of following a “double curriculum” proved so disturbing and stressful that a higher proportion than normal cracked under the pressure and opted for an early return. A necessary premise for this hypothesis is that schools have felt more responsibility for the pupils in this project than for pupils participating in normal AFS/YFU activities, and placed more emphasis on their academic achievements.

6.3 Preparation

Preparation is undertaken prior to departure in order to increase the participants’ ability to cope with the various challenges they are likely to encounter during the stay abroad. It is done to enable the participants to “survive” (prevent early return) and to maximise the learning potential of the activity. It is impossible to give any hard and fast rules on what the “ideal” preparation should consist of: preparation efforts should be geared to the needs of the particular target group in their particular context. Some groups may need more intensive preparation than others, and some type of stay abroad are more challenging than others, and therefore require better preparation.

In relation to the Comenius individual mobility pilot project, however, it makes sense to speak about five different general aspects of preparation in relation to the individual participants:

- *linguistic preparation*: where participants are prepared to cope with communication in another language than their own;

⁹ A total of 580 pupils actually attended selection activities, and 341 were selected.

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

Preparation efforts in the pilot project have been in the hands of the national AFS/YFU national organisations, and has taken place both in the home country before departure, and immediately upon arrival in the host country. In the home country, the participants were gathered for (typically) a weekend. The preparation here mainly focused on intercultural issues.¹⁰ In the so called “on-arrival camps” in the host country, the participants received language training, information about practical and cultural issues in the host country, more intercultural training and orientation about psychological issues (homesickness and how to combat it etc.). The typical duration was 2 days. Preparation has been done jointly for both trimester and semester participants, and has also in some cases been combined with the preparation of participants in other AFS/YFU programmes. Even though there have been national variations, the basic contents and methodology have been similar for all 10 countries involved. An advantage of this joint preparation programme has been that the participants have met and established contacts with each other, and in some cases created networks that have been a source of support during difficult periods later. Another argument for organising preparation in this way is that it allows for an economy of scale – it is possible to finance the development of material and the involvement of trainers in a way that would be impossible to organise if preparation were done at individual level. Also, the common preparation ensures a joint “bottom line” for preparation – hosting schools and national AFS/YFU organisations know that all participants as a minimum have received this training, and can count and act upon it. If preparation were an entirely individual affair, there would in all likelihood be enormous differences between the preparation of participants.

It should be mentioned here that some form of preparation also took place in the home country of the participants during the selection seminars. Here, the focus was on the requirements to the individual, and various intercultural games and role plays were enacted both as a basis for selection and preparation. Also, written information on the various aspects of preparation was distributed before the stay.

In their evaluation of the efficacy of the preparation, the participants generally give a positive opinion. Hosting schools were not asked specifically about their opinion of the preparation, but instead asked to comment on any problems encountered during the exchange. Insufficient preparation did not appear as a problem in these answers. Sending schools were asked

¹⁰ A full listing of these preparation seminars is found in EFIL’s third interim report of Feb. 5, 2008 (p. 25)

specifically, and these are generally positive in their evaluations of the preparation offered by the intermediary organisation:

“Preparation was also perfect despite the short time range” (Finnish school/sending)

“The AFS preparation in Hungary – before leaving – was good enough, they covered every possible situation (both at the meeting and in a brochure as well) which was great help (*sic*). Intercultural preparation is a difficult task but our students got some useful advice that really worked...The orientation right after arriving in Germany at the beginning of the programme was good” (Hungarian school/sending)

A few sending schools think that more extensive and individualised preparation should have been offered, but the majority of the (few) negative comments that are registered do not concern the actual contents and length of the preparation, but rather the lack of contact and coordination between the sending school and the intermediary organisation on this issue:

“Since I was not invited to participate in any of these support activities, it is not possible for me to judge on that issue. I’d like to express my deep astonishment about this form of cooperation” (Austrian school/sending)

“The preparatory efforts could have been better adapted to the specific situation of our pupil, and the linguistic preparation in particular was not sufficient – or rather the roles were not sufficiently well defined between us and the AFS....The invitation for the training seminar of AFS was not sent to the pupil’s tutor, and we had no information on the contents of this seminar that could have enabled us to complement the effort” (French school/sending – reply translated from French by the evaluator).

The last comments make the important point that cooperation between the main actors is essential in a project of this character. It is difficult to say when there is “enough” preparation, and there will at any rate inevitably be great individual differences between participants that make extended cooperation necessary. In any case there are aspects of the preparation process as outlined above that cannot be adequately covered during a weekend seminar, or which the intermediary organisations do not have the knowledge and insight to undertake.

This is e.g. the case with linguistic preparation, where it is only possible to give the barest minimum of a survival vocabulary during a weekend seminar, and no time to train other aspects. Many sending as well as hosting schools (and participants as well) mention it as a great problem that pupils arriving in host countries where they knew very little of the language often spent the first month or so more or less clueless about what went on around them during lessons. In all (host) countries, the intermediary organisations offered language courses to the pupils after arrival, but many could not attend because they were geographically too dispersed. This led to frustration, and at least in some cases to a process where the pupil started skipping lessons, and generally disassociating him- or herself from the school. In the event where the pupil does not have any proficiency in the language of the host country, and where the teachers of the hosting school cannot (or will not!) conduct their classes in a shared third language (e.g. English), a preparatory language course while still at home may be a very worthwhile investment – especially for three month stays, where there is

only little time for the pupil to catch up after the first frustrating period¹¹. This would be a task for the school.

Also in terms of practical preparation, the sending school had (or had access to) information that the intermediary organisations did not possess. Through their Comenius partnership, there were in most cases good contacts between the teachers/coordinators of the sending and hosting schools, and they had often visited one another on several occasions. Therefore they had a lot of useful practical knowledge about the hosting schools, which they could pass on to the participating pupil(s) from their school. I have no doubt that this happened in most cases, but there were also cases where this did not happen. Most grotesquely in a case where a pupil arrived at the host school without knowing that this belonged to a national minority, and that lessons were conducted in the language of this. To compound the misery, the pupil was placed in a host family which only spoke the dominant language of the country, so the pupil had in effect to cope with two foreign languages (to which a third was added, as the pupil spoke English with class mates). This babylonian confusion of languages caused great stress, and was undoubtedly conducive to the premature return – but much of the shock could undoubtedly have been alleviated beforehand if the pupil had received the information about the linguistic orientation of the host school. A best-practice example of how this could have been achieved comes from an Italian school with a reciprocal exchange:

“As soon as the exchange was authorized, we put the two pupils in contact with each other, the tutpor, the families in order to prepare and reassure them about the experience they were going to start; they sent messages, photos, information about everything concerning their future stay in the partner school, so, in addition to what the application form requested, when they left they had more points of reference”.

The third aspect of the preparation process where an involvement of the schools was absolutely necessary concerns the pedagogical preparation. Both the schools and the intermediary organisations have learning as their objectives, even though they differ in aims and methods. Whereas the schools mainly impart academic skills (and, for the participating vocational schools, also vocational skills), AFS and YFU promote the acquisition of “intercultural learning”; a concept which is defined in the statement of purpose for AFS as “..the knowledge, skills and understanding needed to create a more just and peaceful world”¹² (similarly, YFU declares that “we seek to transform young people by instilling passion for lifelong learning, and the skills and knowledge to thrive and contribute amidst cultural diversity”¹³). There are important overlaps between the two “curricula” (of the schools and the intermediary organisations, respectively). For one thing, foreign language learning figures pre-eminently in both, and there is total agreement about the ultimate aim: to prepare young people to become active and responsible citizens in society, if not the world (“non scholae, sed vitae”). Yet there is the important difference that learning in AFS/YFU is an entirely voluntary activity with no set syllabus, and no tests or exams at the end, which accord certain privileges. This is opposed to the schools, where the pupils follow a set syllabus and where the exams at the end have a potentially crucial importance for their future life trajectory (e.g.

¹¹ In a 6 month or a one-year stay, participants have time to acquire a passable knowledge of the language of the host country.

¹² AFS Annual Report 2006, p. 1

¹³ YFU Annual Report 2006, p. 2

access to study, certain types of jobs/careers etc.). If school systems and curricula were identical all over Europe, the fact that a pupil spends a period of time abroad in another school would not constitute any problem (apart, of course, from problems arising out of language difficulties). Yet systems and curricula are different, and this means that many teachers/coordinators have feared that pupils risk “losing” the three or six months (or at least significant parts of these), because

- certain subjects may not be offered, or not be offered at the right level;
- teaching methods are different;
- language difficulties may prevent a full understanding of what is taught;
- the pupil may miss out on exams in the home school that are necessary in order to progress;
- the adaptation to a new environment may consume energy that is taken away from academic pursuits;
- teachers in the host school cannot follow and control the pupil as they would do normally, and the pupil may take advantage of this to work less hard or skip lessons.

Besides focusing their recruitment drive on the academically most gifted pupils, the solution to this perceived problem has (for a substantial number of teachers/coordinators) been to plan for the pupil to follow the curriculum of his or her home country, while at the same time attending the classes in the school of the host country. The “learning plan” and the “pedagogical preparation” has thus consisted in putting together a package with material from the home curriculum, that pupils have taken with them (or several packages, which were sent to the pupils on a regular basis) for self-study. In some cases, the sending schools have also sent tests, which the pupils were then asked to sit under the supervision of a teacher of the hosting school.

The unfortunate consequences of this have already been hinted at under “selection”. It would seem fair to assume that other learning processes – the development of intercultural competences and personal skills – have suffered as a consequence of this double-barrelled academic gun being pointed at the pupil. Since a harmonisation of secondary education (and training) is not immediately on the cards in Europe, the solution must be found in a closer cooperation between all the actors in the learning area – i.e. the hosting and the ending schools, the pupil, and (in case such are involved) the intermediary organisations, with a view to agreeing on one curriculum that can satisfy all partners. Barriers to this are partly systemic (systems in many European countries only have very limited possibilities for individualised learning trajectories) and personal (teachers believing that only the curriculum of the home country has any real value, and that anything learned abroad is, at best, of marginal value).

There are quite a few negative comments on this aspect, but some schools also see light at the end of the tunnel and view it mainly as a communication problem, which can be solved over time with the adoption of practical procedures:

“We would have appreciated having more information regarding the details, in some subjects, of the sending school programmes, which would have helped us plan the personal study programmes of both our student in Germany and our guest student here, in Italy....There were no real problems of communication with the German school, apart from the lack of information regarding details of school curricula and programmes, but this could also be due to the fact that the two school structures are different, based on different organisation of

information. Furthermore, a resolvable problem, was that this was an entirely new way of collaborating for both schools, and in the light of this experience, one it should now be possible to improve upon, by streamlining practical procedures (for example what has to be done by each school in order to place the guest student in the best possible way within their school system, precisely what information has each school found that they need, setting up exchanges of teaching materials, comparing programmes and programming methods and priorities, establishing the timing for and ways which the guest student should be evaluated etc.)". (Italian school, reciprocal exchange with a German school).

During the stay abroad:

6.4 Monitoring

Monitoring is concerned with the constant availability of help and support for the pupil in the situations where this is needed. Monitoring is also sometimes called *crisis management*, because it is set up to deal with emergencies (and not small, daily problems of a trivial character). It must be available on a 24/7 basis. In the Comenius individual pupil mobility project, this function was a contractual obligation of the intermediary organisations. During the project, it was to my knowledge only severely tested in one case, which on the other hand is very illustrative of the nature of the problems that can occur.

Very briefly, the case concerns a participant (female), who accused another participant (male) of rape. The two participants came from the same country, and had met at the on-arrival camp in a third country, where they were both hosted. After the boy had visited the girl in her host family one evening, she claimed that he had raped her, but later retracted this accusation. In the meantime, however, she had alerted her family in the home country, who were naturally very upset. It also turned out that she had a boyfriend there. The boy she had accused of rape denied the accusation, and everything was very opaque, with no clear evidence for either version of the story. Host families on both sides became involved, as did the schools, and whole situation threatened to explode when the female pupil's home family flew in, together with her home boyfriend. Yet the counsellors of the intermediary organisation managed to contain the situation, and the outcome was that the female pupil decided to interrupt her stay. She returned with her parents to her home country, while the male pupil involved completed the programme¹⁴. No charges were brought.

In such complex and potentially explosive situations, it is important that those in charge of monitoring have experience with the handling of such incidents, and do not panic - especially in the initial phase, where it was easy to take sides and thus step up the conflict. There were agreed procedures, which the counsellors followed, and which ensured a correct handling of the situation. It probably also mattered that the counsellors belonged to an "outside" organisation representing the interests of both pupils, rather than being associated with one of the sides. Equally – if not more – important was the fact that the counsellors from the intermediary organisation in both the sending and the hosting country worked closely together during the entire process and constantly shared information as it became available. In this way, they were ongoingly able to weigh the statements of the various actors in the drama against one another, and prevent emotions from taking over at the expense of reason.

¹⁴ Information on the case is provided by the exchange of e-mails between the counsellors involved from the intermediary organisation.

Overall, this aspect of the project seems to have worked well. There is evidence of other potential disasters that were defused very early on and never developed, due to the action taken by the counsellors. There are no negative comments on this from hosting or sending schools, but many positive ones:

“Especially the support needs to be mentioned. That’s how it should be done. Personal support for teachers and the school administration plus the exchange student was well taken care of. Perfect work.” (Finnish school/sending).

6.5 Mentoring

Mentoring is different from monitoring in that it doesn’t deal with crises and potential disasters, but focuses on everyday – more “trivial” matters. The term originates in Greek mythology, more precisely from Homer’s *Odyssey*, where Ulysses entrusts the responsibility for the upbringing of his son Telemachus to his old friend Mentor, before he sails away to take part in the siege of Troy. In accordance with this, mentoring can be described as a process whereby an educated and experienced older person supervises and facilitates the learning process and personal development of a young person. In the context of transnational mobility, the mentor is the person in the host country who fulfils that role vis-a-vis the (young) participant, and is thus a very important link in the quality assurance of the project.

In the Comenius individual mobility project, the mentoring role is assigned to the hosting schools in the “Guidelines for Applicants”¹⁵:

“Once it is confirmed that your school will host a pupil, identify among your teachers a mentor who will take care of the contacts with the partner school and the coordinating organisation in your country”.

The tasks of the mentor in relation to the pupil are described as:

- “1. Organise the introduction of the pupil in your school”
2. Help the pupil in adjusting to the new school system”¹⁶

In the questionnaire to the hosting school, a control question was inserted just to check whether the school actually complied with this. It would have been astonishing if any school had actually answered in the negative to this, and everybody duly confirm that a such has been appointed. The mentor is in most cases either the Comenius coordinator at the school, the class teacher (or a teacher who has classes with the participant), or a language teacher (who can communicate with him/her). Some schools report of appointing two mentors, and at least one hosting school had beforehand appointed a pupil-mentor in the school – one of its own pupils who had the task to look after the participant and help with his or her integration into the school environment.

¹⁵ Article 7, p. 8

¹⁶ Idem

However, it is clear that the tasks involved are experienced as very heavy by many of the appointed mentors. Especially since all the administrative issues in connection with the exchange in many schools also seem to have become the exclusive responsibility of the mentor (and also the identification of host families). Most mentors report that they put in a lot of work, but that there was no compensation offered for this – it had to be undertaken on top of their normal workload. The frustration is very clear in some comments. Two of the answers to the question of whether the school would be interested in hosting again illustrate this quite well:

“School is interested, but I’m not interested in continuing as a Comenius coordinator. There is too much responsibility and paperwork involved to do it free of charge” (Estonian mentor/Comenius coordinator).

“In principle yes, if somebody could be found who would take over the mentoring job. I have my doubts about this. The bureaucratic workload with absolutely no compensation is a deterrent”. (Austrian mentor).

Those that do report of a compensation offered, rarely give any negative comments – even though they mention that the size of the compensation stands in no relationship with the actual workload. It would thus seem that it is the lack of recognition of the efforts put in that rankle equally much – or more – than the fact that they work more than they are paid for. The organisation of the exchanges and the work involved is apparently seen by management in many schools as a voluntary activity to be undertaken outside of normal hours and with no compensation.

“À la longue, the preparation, accompaniment and evaluation of pupils’ stages (sic) in the framework of schools is not possible on a honorary basis...In my opinion internationalisation of everyday school life cannot work in a durable way if it is not a job like others in school” (Austrian mentor).

Besides the workload, few schools mention any problems in relation to the mentoring. It would be interesting, however, to go deeper into the actual perception of the mentors as to the nature of their role, in particular in relation to the pupils during their stay. In the comments from the hosting schools, the bureaucracy and e.g. the problems in connection with the finding of host families tend to dominate at the expense of the direct contact with pupils. Sending schools – when commenting on this aspect – are generally positive:

“The host school did whatever was in their power to integrate our pupil’s normal courses in the curriculum. There was a good introduction to the school life and the Italian way of learning and living. The school did a great job and the teachers’ efforts show that they have received her with their hearts” (Belgian school).

Many schools, however, lack regular and structured feedback on the academic progress of the participating pupil. One school suggests:

“In my opinion, it could have been useful if the host school had had to send some reports about the guest student. A brief one, maybe on a form prepared by this programme.

Mid-stay camps were organised for the participants in all countries. In some countries, these were undertaken at national level and typically organised over a weekend. In other countries, they were organised by the local/regional chapters of the intermediary organisations.¹⁷ These mid-stay activities gave the participants the possibility to reflect about their experiences so far, and to discuss problems/issues with one another and with AFS/YFU volunteers.

After the stay abroad:

6.6 Evaluation

Evaluation at the end of the stay in relation to the individual participant is undertaken in order to ascertain whether the stipulated goals have been met, and to identify possible side effects that were not planned from the onset – both positive and negative ones. From the organisers' point of view, it is furthermore interesting to gather any information that may lead to an improvement of future activities (if such are foreseen). Evaluations of the individual participants are arguably best undertaken if there is a basis of comparison – e.g. a learning plan elaborated before the stay (“base-line data”) where the learning aims have been formulated. There is thus ideally a direct connection with the evaluation and the pedagogical preparation activities. A difficulty with the evaluation of learning outcomes from transnational mobility is that some aspects of these – especially in relation to personal and intercultural competences – can be very hard to detect and measure, and sometimes only become visible a while after the return.

Evaluation activities in the Comenius individual pupil mobility project were carried out by the intermediary organisations both at the end of the stay (by the national organisation in the host country), and after homecoming (by the national organisation in the sending country). Also, the sending schools carried out their own evaluation/debriefing activities for the individual pupils, when these had returned to their home country. As part of the overall evaluation undertaken by EFIL and the external evaluator, the sending and hosting schools as well as the participants were asked to fill in a semi-structured questionnaire about the experience and the perceived outcomes.

The end-of-stay seminars of the intermediary organisations were in some cases held in conjunction with similar events for participants in the organisations' other programmes. This was e.g. the case in connection with the end-of-stay seminar in Paris, which I attended. During this stay, which was organised from Friday to Saturday, the participants were gathered for plenary and group sessions, where various aspects of the stay were discussed. On the whole, however, the seminar was less an evaluation than a reflection seminar (see below), and, of course, a farewell event for the participants to mark the end of their adventure.

In the questionnaires to the sending schools, these were asked to give details on how they had (or intended to) evaluate the experience with the pupil. The actual nature of this evaluation is hard to assess, however, since most simply state that they have “discussed the experience” with the pupil. This may mean many things – from casual conversations to structured discussions – but the evidence from the interviews would seem to indicate that it is primarily the former rather than the latter. Whereas most schools acknowledge the positive outcome in

terms of personal development, the focus of the evaluations of learning outcomes in the more academic sense seems in many cases to have been what the pupils have *missed* (by being away from their home school) rather than what they have *gained* from the experience of living in another country and attending a different school system.

“... we go through her school curriculum and invite her to compare her courses and the contents of our school....There will not be much time for evaluation when our pupil comes home and exams are waiting for her. She missed a semester of studies and has some courses to catch up”.

Only one sending school mentions that they have involved the hosting schools in their evaluation, even though it must have happened (if only in an unofficial way) in other cases:

“We agreed with the partner school that each teacher who had the foreign student in his/her classes would write a brief report about the topics covered, the student’s participation, interest and progress. The teachers at the sending school will take the reports into account in their mid-term and final evaluation” (Italian school).

Many schools also report that they try and stimulate the pupils’ own evaluation process by requesting them to do presentations for their classmates and to write articles and reports for the school magazine or website.

6.7 Recognition

Recognition is about making sure that the (academic) learning from the stay is integrated – at least in part - into the pupils’ curriculum at the home school, so that it is avoided that they have to follow a double curriculum (or even have to repeat the period they have spent abroad). This would – as previously mentioned – not constitute any problem if school systems all over Europe were identical (harmonisation) or operated with a portfolio-based approach, which allowed pupils to construct individual learning trajectories. However, this is not the case, even though some systems are more flexible than others. Most systems operate with very strict curricula, and missing out on three or six months’ attendance at the home school may cause big problems – perhaps even cause pupil to do badly in their final exams, with very real consequences for their future career possibilities. In particular when the pupils go to a country where they do not understand the language, the risk is there that they miss out on elements of the required academic learning. Yet on the other hand, they also learn so much more – which does not, however, figure in the official curriculum. This dilemma is illustrated in a comment from a Belgian pupil going to Italy:

“The first month was very difficult for me, I didn’t understand anything of the Italian language. After a few weeks, I followed the AFS Italian course and also in school I followed Italian in other classes. So after two months, I understood everything and I could speak and write in Italian. The scientific lessons like mathematics, physics,...I couldn’t understand, these teachers spoke too fast.”

So on the one side the pupil fell behind in certain subjects – but on the other she acquired a new language, which she would otherwise not have learned. Also, both she and her home school talk about important changes in terms of personal development (increased self-reliance) and new interests and orientations. These skills acquisitions and developments

cannot be recognised in the system, however, which only focuses on the (possible) lacunae in relation to the given academic curriculum.

To a certain extent, the problems caused by the differences in curricula can be alleviated. In many hosting schools, the teachers have obviously gone to great lengths to try and put together a special programme for the participants to ensure that they had they to as high a degree as possible were able to follow the requirements of the curriculum of their home school. Yet for most the requirements of following a double curriculum have caused extra stress and pressure, and probably detracted from other learning processes.

“There was a difficulty to match the studies. Our student did also studies for our school during the exchange period. She did very well, but the time for enough support was very limited. For the student to accomplish two schools at the same time is amazing” (Finnish school/sending).

It would seem that the vocational schools participating generally had an easier time in so far as part of the stay abroad could be organised as a work placement, which was easier to integrate into the home school’s curriculum:

“The education at the host school, particularly as far as the foreign language and practical work in the restaurant and catering business go, has been very helpful for the pupil’s education and training” (Italian vocational school/sending).

6.8 Perspectivation

Learning in transnational mobility projects – in particular the acquisition of “intercultural competence” - is to a large extent based on *reflection*: participants encounter objects and practices that are different from what they are used to in their home environments, and this kicks off a reflection process that opens up their minds to diversity and develops their tolerance and capacity to deal with change. Yet an exposure to diversity does not necessarily in itself lead to a reflection process. If participants do not have the necessary tools and knowledge to see behind these phenomena, they may fail to place them in any relationship with objects and practices in their home culture, and merely perceive them as “exotic” or even “strange”. In fact, they may return with prejudices confirmed (and new ones added), rather than having expanded their horizon and increased their tolerance and capacity for dealing with change. Therefore it is necessary to stimulate and support this reflection process during and after the stay abroad. Participants must be given the opportunity to talk about their experiences, especially of aspects or happenings that have baffled them, and they must be helped to make sense out of these.

A good example of this happened during one of the group-sessions at the end-of-stay seminar I was attending in Paris, where a participant made some negative comments about the French teachers and their inflexibility and rigidity in the lessons, when it came to opening up to doing projects and discussing issues at any greater length that were not quite in tune with the issue taught. Every time they had a good discussion going, he complained, the teacher broke it up and continued with the textbook. However, when he discussed this impression with the other participants, he began to realise that it was more a matter of the French curriculum being more inflexible than what he was used to from his home country, and that teachers were forced to following a rigid schedule that prescribed what pupils should go through more or less from

day to day. The working group was led by a young (French) volunteer who was only five or six years older than the participants, who very ably “animated” the discussion by asking small questions and giving pieces of information that made the participant reflect about his experience in this respect, and wonder whether his first impression (that the teachers were idiots) was the correct one. The theme subsequently moved from a wholesale condemnation of French teachers to a discussion about systemic differences and their respective advantages and disadvantages.

I did not have the opportunity to attend end-of-stay seminars (or indeed mid-stay seminars) in other countries, but my impression is that similar exercises took place here. For the intermediary organisations, the development of intercultural competence is the key outcome of transnational mobility. Consequently they focus on this aspect, and have developed techniques and methods to facilitate this process. Moreover, the persons in charge of the sessions have in most cases undertaken a long-term stay abroad themselves, and have in most cases been trained to carry out such sessions (both intermediary organisations have developed and regularly run special training sessions for staff and volunteers undertaking this task).

From the comments in the questionnaires, it is not possible to see to what extent this process was continued in the sending schools when the participants returned, but from the interviews with sending schools it would seem that this was not the case – at any rate not in any structured way. It is also doubtful whether teachers have any material at their disposal – or have undergone targeted training – that enable them to do this. One teacher I interviewed mentioned that she was currently undergoing a training course offered by the regional education authorities that provided her with tools and competences to work with European projects. In most cases, however, I suspect that teachers only have their own experience to guide them in this.

6.9 Retention

Many comments from the schools (and also from the participants) claim that dramatic (positive) developments have taken place even during a three months stay abroad. The comments are so similar that as a reader you are almost bored by their repetitiveness, until you begin to reflect about the quite momentous changes they must cover:

“She has become another person these three months” (Belgian school/3 months’ stay)

“She has grown from a teenager towards a very accomplished young woman” (Finnish school/3 months stay)

“She seems to have come back almost another person” (Italian school/3 months’ stay).

These developments have come about first and foremost as a result of the challenges that the participants have met and dealt with. It has undoubtedly also played a role that they have been away from their usual environment and in entirely new surroundings, where they have been free to bring into play and experiment with aspects of their personality that have perhaps been more suppressed back home. Timid and reticent pupils have become open and talkative, they have taken up new hobbies and interests, found new types of friends, discovered and cultivated abilities which even their parents never suspected they had etc.

When the participants return, however, they will in many cases return to an environment that more or less expects to find the same person as the one that left three or six months ago. The

effect of the environment on a person's personality and self-perception can be very strong, and there is always a danger that participants fall back into their old role and become the person they were before they left, and more or less encapsulate their experiences from abroad and stow it away somewhere in the back of their mind – what Bruce La Brack has called “the shoebox effect”¹⁸. This is a risk that also exists for more “hard-nosed” new skills acquired during the stay – e.g. proficiency in a new language, which can gradually wither away and disappear because it is not used and stimulated. It requires a conscious and determined effort of the participants to continue along the tracks laid during the stay abroad. One teacher in an interview told about a pupil who was contemplating changing school after her stay abroad, and go to another school where teaching was done in the language of the host country of her stay. Yet she was very hesitant about this, as it might entail losing all her friends in the old school.

In order to hold on to the positive developments that have happened during the stay abroad, the participants may often need support and assistance from “significant others” – teachers, guidance counsellors (and, of course family and friends). Exchange organisations offer a possibility of a supportive community through membership in a local or regional branch of the organisation, and it would not be surprising if quite a few of the participants on the Comenius individual pupil mobility project have joined these after homecoming. But it is important that also the schools are aware of this issue, and take appropriate steps to ensure that support is at hand so that the participants' positive developments can be maintained and continued. Guidance counsellors may play a key role in this by providing information and assistance to the participants to help them act upon their experiences – e.g. by finding language courses so that they can maintain their proficiency in the language of the host country, or by pointing out education and career opportunities where the newly acquired skills and competences can be brought into play.

This is, of course, a longer-term process, and one that it has not been possible to follow up on and cover in the framework of this evaluation exercise. It is my impression, however, that it is not one that schools are conscious of. Their main priority seems to be that the participants as quickly as possible catch up with the possible lacunae in their academic skills caused by the absence from their home school.

6.10 Reintegration

A final issue in the debriefing process is reintegration, which has to do with easing the return of the participants into their old environment. This does not mean turning them into their old selves again. Rather, rather it consists of the acknowledgement of the fact that a long-term stay abroad can be a very intense emotional experience, and that homecoming can be quite stressful. Just as many participants experience a “culture shock” when they arrive in the host country, they may also run into what has been called a “reverse culture shock”¹⁹ when they return. They have met exiting new people, made strong friendships with whom they have shared deep and wonderful experiences, and now they must turn their back to it all and may not see them again

¹⁸ See Stadler 1994, p. 212

¹⁹ Storti (2001), p. 100

An important part of the treatment for reverse culture shock actually consists in acknowledging that it can happen, and prepare participants before had that homecoming – especially after the first ecstatic days – may actually for some be quite a painful experience. Also, to give them the space to talk about and relive their experiences; e.g. by making them give presentations to their classmates and others at the school, write articles etc. This is all an important part in the processing of the many impressions and experiences that they bring home with them. Many – if not most – schools report that they do this, and some also use the participant to prepare other pupils going to the Comenius partner school on class exchanges. The participants which join exchange organisations as volunteers afterwards will of course have plenty of opportunities to talk about their experiences to an attentive audience.

As with retention (see above), reintegration is a longer-term process, which cannot be adequately covered by this evaluation. However, it needs to be mentioned as it constitutes an important part of the “engineering” of long-term individual mobility projects.

7. PRACTICAL QUALITY ASSURANCE

Technical aspects are – directly or indirectly – also important to the learning processes. This is most clearly the case with accommodation, where the use of home stays (host families) undoubtedly furnishes important elements to the (inter)cultural learning process. But also issues like travel arrangements, liability, insurance, grant management and information flows can influence this, albeit only indirectly, if they disturb the implementation of project activities in a way that affect individual participants: a feeling of insecurity is not very conducive to producing a learning environment. The practical aspects of “project engineering” are concerned with:

- Accommodation
- Travel arrangements
- Grant management
- Insurance
- Liability
- Information flows
- Organisational issues

As already stated in the introduction to this report, I have in the evaluation of travel arrangements, grant management, insurance and liability focused on the transferability of procedures, rather than on their execution. In the context of this evaluation, it is not interesting to see whether EFIL (or the national AFS and YFU organisations) have performed their tasks in accordance with their contractual obligations; this is an issue for EFIL’s own evaluation activities. What is interesting is whether the actual procedures themselves have functioned satisfactorily, and to what extent they can be applied to a new organisational setting with other actors.

7.1 Accommodation

In the Comenius individual mobility pilot project, accommodation was foreseen as home stays, i.e. that participants stayed with host families for the duration of the exchange. Home stays make sense in a project like this, and for two reasons. Firstly, because the majority of

participants are still quite young and have no experience of living on their own. They will need someone to take care of them and to supervise them outside of school hours. Secondly, staying with a family will afford them a unique insight into the culture and mentality of the host country, and give them the possibility to contrast and compare their practices and customs with those of the home country. Being with a host family is also part of the linguistic immersion process.

The participating pupils are overwhelmingly satisfied with their host families²⁰, and many also express this satisfaction in their comments, including its importance in their overall learning process:

“My stay went very well – better than I hoped. One reason is my wonderful family, which made my stay very pleasant. This experience has learnt me a lot about independence, understanding and the importance of friendships” (Finnish pupil staying 3 months in Italy).

All the ordinary exchange activities undertaken by AFS and YFU are based on home stays, and the organisations have established clear procedures on both recruitment and selection of host families. Also, the organisations have networks of former host families, who have declared themselves willing to host again. In the Cominius individual mobility pilot project, however, the recruitment of host families was done by the schools²¹ on the basis of a profile²² of the participant received from the sending school. Ideally, the school would then provide a number of potential host families which were compatible with the participant’s needs, and the final selection and screening (vetting) of the host family would then be done by the intermediary organisation according to their usual procedures. Only in exceptional circumstances – e.g. where it turned out impossible for the hosting school to provide a host family – would the intermediary organisations activate their network and find a host family from there.

Besides screening host families, the intermediary organisations also provided information and training²³ to families in order to prevent misunderstandings and to prepare them for the task of receiving a young person from another country (and another national culture) in their midst.

It is normal practice for AFS/YFU not to pay the host families anything. This is done from the conviction that the decision to become a host family should be taken purely for altruistic reasons, and not out of any financial motive. This practice was also followed in the Comenius individual pupil mobility project.

In the questionnaires, app. 10% of the hosting schools have mentioned finding a host family under “main problems encountered”. It furthermore emanated very clearly from the interviews that this had been one of the biggest preoccupations of the hosting schools. In fact, 19 planned exchanges had to be cancelled before departure because it was not possible to find

²⁰ 84% declare themselves “satisfied”, only 3% are not satisfied.

²¹ Guide for Applicants, p. 8

²² AFS/YFU had elaborated a standard form for this

²³ In the case I looked at (Denmark), host families were visited by an AFS volunteer who discussed aspects of hosting with them. Families also received a leaflet with written information.

a suitable host family²⁴. Part of the explanation for this difficulty was undoubtedly the short deadline:

“At the beginning of the programme the biggest difficulty was finding host families. For example our Italian partner could not host the student who would have loved to go there” (Hungarian school/sending).

“Finding a host family was very difficult! It took a long time: nearly nobody was interested” (Belgian school/hosting)

“The main problem was to find host families to the exchange student because there was such a tight schedule” (Finnish school/hosting).

Out of the 103 questionnaires received from hosting schools, 8 respondents reported that the host family was provided by AFS/YFU, so it was seemingly important that this safety net was present for the schools.

Some pupils were hosted by two families during the stay, as 3 (or 6) months was considered too long a period to host for some families. In the end, however, most had positive experiences with hosting:

“The father of the host family was unsure of his family’s readiness to take care of the student the whole time, so he promised a 6-week stay at the beginning and needed some encouragement, but the result was positive” (Finnish school/hosting)

Some schools consider that some form of payment for the host families would have made more families interested:

“The problem lies in finding host families...a financial compensation would make things easier” (French school/hosting)

“They also expressed that a financial compensation would have helped them too in their everyday life expenses” (French school/hosting).

For schools in less wealthy areas, where accommodation on average is smaller (and in some cases families bigger!) finding host families constitutes a more significant challenge than for schools situated in more affluent areas. In the “Guide for Applicants”, it is recommended that schools try and organise reciprocal exchanges²⁵, i.e. where two schools agree to both host and send pupils with each other. The advantage in terms of host family finding is that the participants’ families can then be used as host family for the arriving pupil. This happened in a number of cases, but this practice also has its dangers:

“Unfortunately our visiting pupil suffered so much from home sickness that she had to interrupt her stay with us prematurely. However, as it was organised as a reciprocal exchange

²⁴ EFIL Mobility Progress Report no. 2, October 2007

²⁵ Guide for Applicants, p. 6

(my pupil lived with the family of the visiting pupil), my pupil also had to return before the planned end of the stay” (German school/hosting and sending).

Such a situation need not necessarily have resulted in a premature return of both pupils. There were a number of cases where host families had to be changed during the stay because of a basic incompatibility between the personalities of pupil and host family. In those cases, either the school or AFS/YFU stepped in and found a new host family, and the stay was completed.

A couple of schools that also have boarding facilities suggest that it be allowed to use these to put up exchange pupils rather than finding host families.

In their report, pupils are asked to state their degree of satisfaction with the host family, and the overwhelming majority are positive. Many furthermore explicitly mention positive experiences with the host family (outing, events, family life in general etc.). It would therefore seem that the stay in a host family was a both valuable and valued aspect of the overall mobility experience.

7.2 Travel arrangements

International travel arrangements were taken care of by the intermediary organisations in order to ensure that the participants were available for both the on-arrival (preparation) camp and the end-of-stay (debriefing) event. This caused some administrative problems, as the costs for international travel had to be covered by the schools out of their grant. The intermediary organisations consequently bought the tickets, and the schools then subsequently had to reimburse AFS/YFU. This gave rise to some frustration among the schools (see quotation below).

The fear of the intermediary organisations was that logistics (“meet and greet” at the airport, transportation to preparation camp, transportation to the airport after joint debriefing) would become a nightmare if schools were allowed to make their own (individual) travel arrangements. Some schools might possibly also decide to skip these joint events, if they were in charge of travel arrangements themselves.

A further argument brought forward by EFIL for organising joint travel was linked to risk management (groups would minimise the possibilities of mishaps during travel).

7.3 Grant management

In short, the procedure for grant management was that the (sending) schools received a grant after the exchange had been approved, out of which they were to cover all expenses related to the project (including international travel expenses – see above). The grant was paid out in an initial instalment (80%), and a second instalment (the remaining 20% or the balance) which was paid when the school had submitted the final report and statement of account. The decision on the staggering of the grant payment was made to ensure that there would be a financial incentive for schools to make the final report (however, at the end of the report it turned out that some schools had put the budget for international travel so high that the amount due was negligible - in a few cases the schools actually were obliged to return money from the grant). International travel was covered 100%; for all other costs, a monthly allowance for each pupil was given according to a fixed scale. This monthly allowance was (in principle) forwarded from the school to the participating pupils’ families, who then were

responsible for how the participants spent the amount²⁶. The allowance seems to have been sufficient to cover the costs of the pupil (the only problems seem to have arisen with a few pupils who were in rural areas with a long transportation time to the host school. In some countries, pupils travel for free, whereas they in others must pay for this themselves)²⁷.

In connection with the grant management, two general problems arose. One was that schools in some countries/cases did not have sufficiently flexible financial regulations to allow for the implementation of such projects; in particular because some schools (for various reasons) decided to organise the payment of the pupil's expenses themselves, rather than forwarding the allowance to his or her family, as foreseen in the Guide for Applicants. An extensive quote from a sending school will illustrate the complications that arose because of this:

“A very big problem was around accountancy. The sending school got the monthly allowance and the travel expenses of the students on the school's bank account. However, the AFS bought the plane tickets and the school had to give the money back, but a school cannot give out any money without a receipt with the name of the school on it. As the AFS was the purchaser it took weeks, months while our finance manager could find the way to send the money back to the AFS. The monthly allowance also raised questions. In Hungary, the school can only give out money if it gets receipts that cover the exact sum. It meant that the participant students were told to ask for proper receipts (that is accepted by the Hungarian tax office) after every single item they bought: a coke, a book, a theatre ticket, lunch in the school canteen etc. After the first days it became clear that it was impossible and not because of the fault of our students. There are several places where they refuse giving receipts or just do not understand what the difference is between a bill and a receipt. It caused a lot of tension because for a while it seemed that the students would have to pay the monthly allowance back to the school if they cannot prove – by receipts – on what they spent the sum. Again, it took weeks, months while our financial manager chose the scholarship system and she said it was not the real solution for the school because in this case there is no legally regulated way and that is why any decision is a bad decision and someone should take the responsibility. Because of all this it became very complicated and caused lots of problems for the finance department of the school and lots of worries for the students and families. The financial side of the programme should be reconsidered”. (Hungarian school/sending).

The other problem was that in many schools, the contact teachers in addition to the direct contact with the pupil also has been saddled with all the financial issues and the reporting work, and that they have been expected to do that on top of their normal teaching obligations without any compensation or equivalent reduction of workload. The frustration is very visible in some of the reports:

“I received no compensation of any kind...Do not forget that the work is done voluntarily and the administrative burden is far too heavy (in terms of time and energy). It would seem that the technocratic aspects have priority over pedagogic considerations: teachers are not

²⁶ Guidelines for Applicants, p. 11

²⁷ In one case, a controversy arose because the coordinator of the host school had decided to move the participant to another school, which was a private (fee-paying) school. These costs were not covered by the allowance.

secretaries, and they are the ones that have to face the pupils and try and alleviate the shortcomings of the systems” (French school/sending and hosting)²⁸

“I was “allowed” to do the entire financial work concerning this pilot project, without getting any compensation whatsoever. Here I have clearly been doing the work of some Brussels bureaucrat, who was paid to do it in the first place....**I feel exploited!** (Austrian school/sending and hosting)²⁹.

Likewise, to the question as to whether the school would be prepared to host a pupil from abroad again, an Estonian teacher answers: “School is interested, but I’m not interested in continuing as a Comenius coordinator. There is too much responsibility and paperwork involved to do it free of charge”. From the 103 questionnaires received from hosting schools, only 12 report that they received any kind of compensation for the work involved (2 Finnish and 9 Italian schools – even though for at least a couple of the Italian and for one Finnish school it would seem that the compensation is for being the overall Comenius coordinator, and not for the work specifically in relation to the individual pupil mobility pilot project).

7.4 Insurance

The pupils were covered by a joint insurance policy taken out by EFIL. The insurance was similar to the one used by AFS/YFU in their normal exchange activities, and covered illness, accident, death, permanent disability, and repatriation. Fortunately, the insurance scheme was not put to any serious test, but in the few cases where it was necessary to have recourse to this, it seems to have covered adequately³⁰. The advantage of a joint insurance policy (rather than each pupil being covered by individual insurances) is that a such makes it absolutely sure that everybody is covered, and that coverage is identical. Another possible advantage is the reduced costs of a joint policy rather than individual ones (economy of scale).

The approach here is similar to the one adopted in the European Voluntary Scheme under the EU’s Youth-programme, where the individual long-term placements organised here are covered by a joint insurance scheme.

7.5 Liability

“Liability” means the assumption of risks in connection with an activity (“who can you sue if things go wrong...”). Liability is a very serious issue in the context of an individual long-term transnational mobility activity where the majority of the participants are minors (in the legal sense of the word). In the Cominus individual pupil mobility project, the national AFS/YFU organisations carried the liability for the pupils during the exchange.

Liability is intricately linked with insurance (see above). In theory, it is of course possible to insure against anything that might conceivably happen, but this would firstly require that all possible risks could be spelled out and included in the insurance policy, and secondly entail a skyhigh premium. In the context of an exchange project, it would be impossible to list all the

²⁸ Translated from French by the evaluator

²⁹ Translated from German by the evaluator

³⁰ Instances which have required activation of insurance coverage have been listed in EFIL’s Mobility Progress reports. A technical appraisal of the insurance (adequacy of coverage etc.) is not part of this evaluation.

potential mishaps in a manner that leaves no loopholes in the coverage, and secondly the cost of such an insurance would probably cripple the budget hopelessly.

The response to this is *risk management*, where the organiser takes a number of measures to ensure that the possibility of any untoward events is held as low as possible. In the project, this was basically done in three different ways. The first was the delegation of liability to different actors involved, so that this did not remain solely with the organiser. It consisted in making agreements with involved actors (e.g. parents and pupils, host families) outlining rights and responsibilities of each and indicating areas where the organisers cannot take responsibility (in insurance language known as “waivers”). In the agreement between parents/guardians of the participating pupil and the national AFS/YFU organisations, a number of situations are thus defined where AFS/YFU cannot be held responsible – e.g. if the participant drives a car³¹, or for what may happen in the host family. These agreements were based on the documents used by AFS in their regular exchange activities.

Secondly, EFIL ensured that a quality assurance system was in operation that reduced the possibility of disasters happening and developing. This system involved the following elements:

- selection of participants
- practical preparation of participants
- screening of host families
- constant (“24/7”) availability of experienced counsellors in the event of crisis
- agreed procedures in all countries
- trained and experienced staff

The individual elements have to a large extent already been described in the previous section (“Pedagogical quality assurance”), since they can be said to have a double function. What is important here, and what is difficult to replicate, is the fact that these practices and procedures are agreed upon and shared by AFS/YFU staff and volunteers in all the countries involved. As many of the potential crises have an important cross-border dimension (involves actors in both host and sending country) it is important that counsellors in both ends have a common understanding of the problem and have agreed common procedures, as they otherwise may be “wrong-footed” by events. Equally important is it that the counsellors are trained in crisis management, possess the necessary skills and competences (including language skills), and also that they know each other well and have established good working relationships.

The third measure, then, is insurance. In the project, EFIL provided insurance cover for individual participants, but staff and volunteers are also protected against potential litigation through special insurances.

7.6 Information flows

In a complex project with many actors like the Comenius individual pupil mobility project, it is important that information flows freely, and that it is available to relevant actors at the time when it is needed. In the project, the following *main information flows* can be identified (the

³¹ Even though this waiver is perhaps more intended for an American than a European setting

actors mentioned in brackets at the end of each point are the actors responsible for supplying this information):

1. Information to schools about the possibility of individual mobility (Commission/NA)
2. Information to schools about conditions for participation (EFIL)
3. Information to hosting schools about selected pupils (sending school/EFIL)
4. Information to sending school about host families (hosting school/EFIL)
5. Information to participating pupils about the stay (EFIL, sending & hosting schools)
6. Information in relation to learning plan (hosting schools/sending schools/pupil)
7. Ongoing information about progress of pupil (hosting school)
8. Information for evaluation of stay (hosting school/sending school/pupil)

Concerning the first, it is a recurrent complaint from many projects that this information came out so late that they had too little time to react. This may have deprived many potential participants of the possibility of a stay abroad:

“The biggest problem in the project was the VERY short application deadline. Our school wished to send a pupil to our Comenius cooperation partner, but this turned out impossible” (Danish school/hosting).

The tight deadline probably also affected the project negatively in other ways, but presumably such a situation will not occur again, when individual mobility has been integrated into the Comenius programme so that schools are able to plan in a longer time-perspective.

It is interesting to note that the National Agencies (NAs) for the Comenius programme have shown very little interest or enthusiasm for the project³². Vis-à-vis the projects, they in some cases seem to have referred to EFIL (AFS/YFU) as the organiser, even when questions were related to more general Comenius issues. One project notes:

“Another problem that I experienced is that AFS ignores³³ all about Comenius projects. This makes that they can’t answer to some questions and refer to EPOS, where EPOS indicates AFS as organiser” (Belgian school/sending).

The information to the schools about the conditions for participating in the project were furnished by EFIL and outlined in the Guidelines for Applicants (16 pages + annexes). EFIL also provided forms for both pupils and host families (covering the points 3 & 4), where these were asked to fill in all pertinent information related to the stay. These documents were used both as a tool by the intermediary organisations in the matching-process of pupils and host families, and as information material to pupils, their parents, the schools and host families. As for point 5 (“Information to participating pupils about the stay”) is integrated into the preparation process, which has been described elsewhere. EFIL took the lead here, but it is clear that also both sending and hosting schools have a responsibility for this too, since they possess useful information about specific aspects that EFIL does not have (see below). It is perhaps problematic that schools and the intermediary organisations did not work more closely together on this aspect – a few sending schools comment on this in the questionnaire,

³² Information given by national pilot coordinators from the intermediary organisations

³³ Probably a too literal translation of the French “ignorer” = know nothing about

when they were asked to evaluate the preparation and support provided for the pupils by the intermediary organisations:

“Since I was not invited to participate in any of these support activities, it is not possible for me to judge on that issue. I’d like to express my deep astonishment about this form of cooperation” (Austrian school/sending and hosting).

Another teacher states:

“I know next to nothing about this, only the dates. Consequently I feel I am not capable of giving an evaluation of it. However, (x) and (y)³⁴ have given their evaluation, which is very positive” (Finnish school/sending).

The main problem in information flows, however, lies in my opinion in relation to the elaboration of a learning plan for the pupil during his or her stay. The difficulties of achieving some kind of compatibility between the curricula of the education systems in two different countries have already been mentioned elsewhere in this report, but – as the example of some schools show – it is not impossible, given a certain amount of goodwill and flexibility at both ends. Yet most (sending) schools have seemingly opted for a situation where the participant more or less has had to tackle two curricula simultaneously, while at the same time undergoing a difficult and stressful experience of adaptation to a new and largely unknown environment. The victim of this situation is of course the pupil, and thereby indirectly the sending school, who should therefore naturally be the one pushing for the conclusion of such an agreement. But in many cases it would seem that also the sending school is remiss in this respect:

“...we would have appreciated having more information regarding the details, in some subjects, of the sending school programmes, which would have helped us to plan the personal study programmes of both our students Germany and our guest student here in Italy” (Italian school/sending and hosting).

The ongoing information about the progress of the pupil whilst abroad is tackled very differently, but none report of working with this aspect in any structured and systematic way, in particular in connection with the academic aspects. This probably hangs together with the absence of a learning agreement for the pupil, which makes it difficult to “follow up on” or “accompany” anything, other than the pupil’s personal wellbeing. Yet with a learning agreement in place, there are many exiting possibilities, in particular by using the advantages provided by modern information and communication technology. As one teacher remarks:

“I’m someone who works a lot with Web 2.0 applications like blogs, wikis as part of my teaching. To improve the accompaniment of the pupil it would be great if the sending school could make homework and information available to the pupil on a learning platform (e.g. moodle or frontier). This would facilitate the reentry into the home school”³⁵ (German school/hosting).

³⁴ The names of the two pupils from the school that went abroad

³⁵ Translation from German by the evaluator

In relation to the last point (information for evaluation of the stay), it would also seem that no sending schools are tackling this systematically in relation to the hosting school. There is no report of any systematic feedback on the stay or on the achievements of the pupil.

Undoubtedly, this happens in many instances at a personal and informal level between teachers of the hosting and sending school, who have established personal contact, but the knowledge remains in the personal sphere and is not embedded as organisational learning.

7.7 Organisational issues

A criticism that can be levelled at this project is that there seems to have been – at times – a lack of transparency between the various actors in the field (see above). Schools complain that they did not know what went on in the selection and preparation camps organised by the intermediary organisations, and there seems to have been a lack of coordination in preparation activities.

Another aspect that comes up under organisational issues is connected with the overall perception of the project by the schools. Most see it as an opportunity to give a pupil a fantastic experience and to deepen the relationship with Comenius school partners in Europe. Some schools, however, somehow seem not to take ownership of the project and perceive it primarily as an AFS/YFU-thing that they are involved in as a provider of raw materials (pupils), and nothing more – it is not their project (or responsibility):

“I didn’t understand my own role in the exchange pilot project properly. I feel I wasn’t involved enough in it as the practical arrangements were organised by AFS. I mainly took care of the paper work and the contacts with the hosting schools established during the past two years. I trusted that the pupils would act according to the instructions provided by AFS” (Finnish school/sending).

Similarly, a French school (hosting) is highly indignant about having to find a host family for a pupil from their partner school, because they see this as a task for the intermediary organisation (which in this case is not perceived as an intermediary, but as the prime mover and shaker).

8. CONCLUSIONS AND RECOMMENDATIONS

Initially, I would like to reiterate that the aim of this evaluation exercise has not been to establish whether long-term individual exchanges have beneficial effects on individuals and organisations, neither to assess the work done by the intermediary organisations (EFIL at European level and the national AFS/YFU organisations). We already know that long-term individual mobility – if properly planned and executed – does possess a very important learning potential for the participants, and the expertise and capacity of AFS/YFU to deal with such activities and been clearly demonstrated in the course of their more than 50 years of experience in the field.

8.1 Barriers

This knowledge has been further underpinned by this project, where there is ample evidence of the positive effects – both on individuals and organisations – of participation. There are many examples of good – or even “best” – practice emanating from this project, which it is

worthwhile to consider as valuable experiences for the continuation of the activities and their integration into the Comenius programme as a regular feature. It is true, however, that there has been a higher degree of early returns in this project than in the normal exchange activities of AFS/YFU³⁶; a fact that in my view can be ascribed to a set of factors in the construction of the pilot project. A further set of factors with a negative impact are of a more general nature, and are not specific to the pilot project. I will firstly deal with these two negative sets of factor before I turn to the positive aspects of possible transfer value to future activities.

The first set of factors consist of two elements. One is the very short deadline that schools were given to find potential participants and make agreements with their Comenius partner schools abroad. I'm convinced that this has negatively influenced the project in crucial phases, in particular in the selection phase. This is compounded – as the second element - by the confusion in some schools as to their actual role in this project, and their reluctance to take ownership of the project. Whereas the short deadline is a very clearly expressed frustration, the role-confusion is less obvious and in many responses it emanates from reading “between the lines” rather than from clear statements. Many of the school teachers and staff involved undoubtedly know about the intermediary organisations and might possibly also have had pupils who have gone on an AFS/YFU-exchange previously. My impression is that some have possibly failed to differentiate between these and the Comenius individual mobility pilot project. Since many teachers feel stressed and overburdened already, they have been quick to leave the project (or aspects of it) more or less entirely in the hands of the intermediary organisations. I'm thinking here e.g. of preparation, which clearly must be a joint undertaking between the schools and the intermediary organisations, since each have their areas of expertise. At least one premature return that I investigated can in my view largely be ascribed to the fact that the pupil did not get an important piece of information that her home school should have provided. If intermediary organisations are involved again in the implementation of individual pupil mobility under the Comenius-umbrella, appropriate attention must be given to this issue. It must be underlined that the ultimate responsibility rests with the schools, and that whilst it may make sense to delegate aspects of the work to experts (e.g. intercultural preparation), there are areas where only the schools can intervene.

These set of factors (short deadline and ownership) can be largely eliminated once individual long-term pupil mobility has been integrated into the Comenius programme. There are, however, a further set of factors of a more general nature which have emerged very clearly from the evaluation and which need to be addressed if individual long term pupil mobility is to be succesfully integrated into the Comenius programme.

The most serious is the issue of recognition. Participating pupils have in many (most?) cases been expected not only to attend classes in the host schools, but also to follow the curriculum of their home school. They have consequently been sent additional homework during their stay abroad, and upon homecoming they have been required work hard to catch up with the progress of their class-mates during their absence. Some have also had subsequently to sit tests and exams that they missed because of their participation in the project. There is no doubt that this double coursework has placed a lot of extra stress on the shoulders of pupils who are already fighting to cope with the adaptation process to a completely new

³⁶ Which is all we have to compare with – schools have no or only very limited experience with long-term individual mobility, and no figures are available.

environment, and may arguably be the cause of other premature returns. The causes of this lamentable state of affairs are, in my view, twofold. Firstly, it is true that systems of secondary education in many countries are – still - rigid and inflexible, and do not allow for more individualised learning trajectories. In many countries, this is now changing, and structures are becoming more flexible and malleable, but changes are slow to take effect, and we are probably still a long way from a situation where learning of the type acquired in a different system – both in terms of personal and academic skills – can be integrated and recognised. Secondly, however, many schools have seemingly not gone to the trouble of investigating differences and similarities in the curriculum of the two schools and putting together an individual learning plan for the pupil that combine enough elements of both to make it acceptable in both contexts. Differences in curriculum (and teaching methods) may vary greatly between European countries, but in my view not to an extent to make this a mission impossible. One participating pupil I spoke to told me that the demands of this “double curriculum” had forced to spend many evenings and weekends alone in her room studying, rather than further exploring the mentality and culture of the host country together with friends and host family. This seems to me almost to defeat the rationale for transnational mobility.

The recognition issue is therefore one which requires attention. In the long run, it may be necessary to work along political lines (like with the ECVET-system currently being developed in the context of vocational education and training). On a more immediate basis, efforts need to be made to develop models for learning agreements at the level of individual pupils that can eliminate at least the worst cases of double coursework in stays abroad. If left unattended, the consequences are that: a) only the academically most gifted pupils will be allowed by their schools to participate, and b) participating pupils will miss out on important learning opportunities during their stay because they need to study for their home school.

Another structural factor which impacts negatively transnational mobility in secondary schools is the lack of internationalisation strategies at school level. This may at first seem a somewhat strange conclusion, since the participating schools already are in Comenius partnerships, but it hinges on an understanding of what an “internationalisation strategy” actually is. In the questionnaire to hosting schools, the respondents are directly asked if there is a such at their school, and all answer in the affirmative. However, when asked whether there is any compensation – in terms of additional payment or reduction of workload – of the teachers responsible for the concrete manifestation of this internationalisation” (in this case: the Comenius individual mobility pilot project), the answer is in the majority of the cases negative. The frustration over this is evident in many replies, and some make it clear that it goes for the “position” of Comenius co-ordinator generally – that time consumption for all activities in relation to this are unpaid, and that they are expected to cover their ordinary workload (teaching) at the same time, with no reduction in hours. Some also mention that they are expected to cover all types of work in relation to the exchanges – also statements of accounts etc. The “double curriculum” problem is apparently not restricted to pupils only!

In the interviews I made with both sending and hosting schools, I tried to explore this issue further. It emerged quite clearly from these that the international activities in half of the schools were less the result of an institutional strategy than the initiative of committed and idealistic individuals among the staff (typically language teachers). They carried out their work more or less in isolation from their colleagues as individuals rather than team-members.

It is, of course, debatable whether this state of affairs is representative of a significant amount of participating schools, but assuming it is, it raises some important concerns for future exchange activities. When practically everything in connection with international activities – from planning to execution - is concentrated in the hands of one or at most a few individuals rather than being embedded as an integral feature of the organisation, it becomes vulnerable. Once this person leaves, it is tantamount to a library burning: all personal contacts and practical experience and expertise with international projects disappear from the organisation, and work on new activities has to be resumed more or less from scratch, with obvious consequences for the quality of the activities. It would be interesting to look deeper into this, as the data material is not extensive enough at this stage. A possible recommendation could be to focus more on internationalisation strategies of participating schools and formulate some minimum requirements to these, as a prerequisite for participation in a Comenius project.

8.2 Transferability

The concept of “examples of good practice” concerns the methods and tools used in a given project, and it should be approached with some caution. In itself, an example of good practice can only say something about what worked in a particular context and at a particular moment in time. What e.g. works for one target group, or in one particular educational setting, may fail miserably when used on other target groups or in different settings. Secondly, in a context of transnational mobility, an example of good practice – even when it is eminently transferable – cannot stand on its own. It doesn’t make for a good project if you have absolutely top-class linguistic preparation, if the other aspects of the preparation process are neglected. And a good, rounded preparation process may be similarly reduced in an overall project context if nothing is done about the debriefing of participants after their return. “Good practices” must be embedded in a holistic quality assurance system, that covers practical as well as pedagogical aspects.

In the Comenius individual mobility pilot project, examples of good practice can be found both in the work of the intermediary organisations and the schools. In the evaluation, I focused especially on the methods and tools of the “professionals” – i.e. the intermediary organisations – who deal with long term individual transnational mobility on a daily basis. When the individual mobility scheme is introduced as an integrated part of the Comenius programme, and if it is decided that intermediary organisations are not going to play any role in this, then schools and National Agencies – alone or in combination – will have to perform the tasks that have been carried out by these in the pilot project. This is hardly a problem for some aspects: grant management, for example, can easily be done by the National Agencies, who have this as one of their core skills. Others, however, may prove more difficult. Here, one might mention:

- selection of participants;
- selection, screening and training of host families;
- intercultural and psychological preparation of participants;
- monitoring (risk management)
- counselling of pupils;
- various aspects of debriefing – in particular perspectivation

Each of these aspects will, upon closer scrutiny, contain any number of “good practices”. Taking e.g. the intercultural and psychological preparation activities carried out in each

country, they involved a whole range of tools and methods that AFS/YFU have developed over the years, or found in other contexts and adapted for use in theirs. It was also in my view an example of good practice when the National AFS/YFU organisations gathered all participants in the host country for a couple of days in the beginning of the stay in order to prepare them for this. It ensured a common “bottom line” in terms of preparation, it encouraged the formation of networks among the participants that could be activated in times of need; and it made sense in a financial perspective to undertake aspects of the preparation process in groups rather than individually.

It is, of course, possible to imitate the tools and approaches of the exchange organisations for use by other actors (e.g. schools and the National Agencies); but a mere “copy and paste” operation will not suffice. Behind each practice, there is a body of more or less “tacit knowledge” that will have to be teased out and made verbal, so that it can be communicated to others. Also involved actors (teachers and Comenius organisers at the schools, staff at National Agencies) need to be trained in their use. We might find an example of this in the European Voluntary Scheme (EVS), an action under the Youth programme. Since 1996, the EVS has offered financial support for projects involving individual long-term mobility for young people in the age bracket 18-25³⁷. During this period, a range of tools and methods have been developed in order to support the activities, notably

- charters outlining the rights and responsibilities for participants as well as hosting and sending organisations (“quality assurance framework”);
- a manual for organisers of long-term voluntary mobility;
- training courses for people in charge of sending and hosting;
- “toolboxes” with material for preparation and debriefing;
- a manual for risk prevention and crisis management.

The existence of manuals and toolboxes is in itself no guarantee of quality. The actors involved must also be committed to using them, and there must be a uniformity of approach to allow for coherence and cohesion in the exchange. Deficient preparation, for instance, will affect the quality of the whole stay, no matter how well the other elements are covered. Likewise, if there is no common agreement about procedures to follow in the event of crises occurring during the stay, these may escalate out of hand. Complete “decentralisation” of all activities may therefore be problematic, and a central intervention for one or more aspects may be deemed necessary in order to achieve a common “bottom line”; e.g. in relation to aspects of preparation and debriefing. National Agencies may thus run preparation and debriefing camps like the one organised by the intermediary organisations in the Comenius individual pupil mobility project – either off their own bat or by subcontracting other organisations (e.g. exchange organisations) to do this. In the European Voluntary Scheme, the Danish National Agency has e.g. recently contracted two exchange organisations (ICYE³⁸ and AFS) to organise and run preparation and mid-stay seminars for foreign participants coming to Denmark. As mentioned previously, gathering groups of pupils for joint activities also has an added value in itself (network-building), and there is furthermore also a financial

³⁷ These stays abroad are organised as placements in voluntary organisations in other Member States of the European Union. The stays are of a duration between 2-12 months.

³⁸ International Cultural Youth Exchange

argument, as it undoubtedly would be cheaper than running individual preparation activities for each participating pupil at school level.

The comparison with the European Voluntary Scheme should be made with some caution, however. In a coming Comenius individual pupil mobility programme, we will be dealing with a target group that is significantly younger than the target groups of EVS, and hence with less life experience to tackle and overcome the challenges that a long-term stay abroad may expose them to. Moreover, the stays are implemented in a formal educational context, which means that learning outcomes must be recognised as (at least) the equivalent of the learning that would otherwise have taken place in the home institution of the participants. Therefore, in a Comenius-context, accommodation should be organised with host families in order to ensure a framework of support in daily life outside of the school, and individual learning agreements should be elaborated before departure to avoid that participating pupils are forced to follow a “double curriculum” while abroad.

In the pilot project, the intermediary organisations provided a comprehensive and coherent quality assurance system, based on many years of experience and on the work of committed and trained staff. Seen in a holistic perspective, I only missed two elements in relation to this. One was the presence of individual learning agreements for participating pupils, that would have tackled the recognition issue and thus removed a significant stress-factor from the stays. The other was a more concerted approach by the involved actors (notably schools and the intermediary organisations) so that activities could be coordinated and finetuned. It is in principle not important who does what, but it is essential that all aspects of the quality assurance system are covered, and that actors have the necessary knowledge and the tools to perform their functions satisfactorily.

On the basis of the findings of my evaluation study of the Comenius individual pupil mobility project, I consequently view the following elements as indispensable in relation to the integration of individual long-term pupil mobility into the Comenius programme:

- accommodation organised as home stays (host families);
- the elaboration of individual learning agreements as a prerequisite for participation, to be signed by both sending and hosting schools as well as the pupil him- or herself;
- 24/7 monitoring
- mentoring
- adequate preparation and debriefing³⁹ undertaken both at local and central (national) level;
- transparency for all actors at all levels in the process.

In order to achieve this, the following materials and services should be present at the beginning of the programme:

- a charter/charters outlining the rights and responsibilities of all actors (schools, National Agencies, pupils, parents, host families, any intermediary organisations involved);
- common guidelines for selection of participants;
- common guidelines for selection and screening of host families;

³⁹ In accordance with the pedagogical quality assurance system used in the evaluation

- a clear risk management strategy, including allocation of liability;
- materials (documents, manuals, “toolboxes”) to support activities at local, regional and national level;
- training courses offered at national and European level for organisers (schools, National Agencies)

It would also seem useful to investigate the possibility of a joint insurance scheme for all participants (as is the case in the EVS-programme) to ensure full and uniform coverage for all participating pupils.

It is at present not decided exactly how individual pupil mobility – when it becomes integrated into the Comenius programme as a permanent feature – will be organised and implemented. The only thing that is certain is that it will be decentralised and run by the National Agencies⁴⁰ in analogy with other EU mobility programmes. In this context it has been compared to the Leonardo da Vinci programme, but there are significant differences. In Leonardo, there has until recently been no individual mobility (only groups), the average age of the participants has been higher, and the stays abroad have been much shorter (3-4 weeks as opposed to the 3-6 months in the Comenius activities). There is thus arguably not a lot of experience to draw on here, other than in connection with administrative issues.

The lack of insight and knowledge of principal actors (schools and possibly National Agencies) is a problem in the short run. However, tools and methods can be copied and/or adapted, and expertise can be bought – at least in a transition phase. Intermediary organisations may play a role here, e.g. as providers of joint preparation seminars or monitoring services. A bigger challenge, in my view, is the difficulties connected with ensuring a common quality consciousness among all actors. In the pilot project, the intermediary organisations have performed key functions (selections, aspects of preparation and debriefing, risk management including monitoring) according to a shared understanding of quality and agreed procedures. This is an important issue, for all aspects of the quality assurance system hang together, and if one is missing or insufficiently performed, the whole project is likely to suffer. In the future, these aspects will (to a larger or smaller degree) be taken over by other - more dispersed and less experienced – actors. How is it ensured that all share a common understanding of what “quality” is, and agree on the same criteria in its implementation? This is a thing from the pilot project that cannot be transferred by a copy and paste-operation.

Specific attention must furthermore be given to the recognition issue – both in the short and in the long run. In the short run, individual learning agreements must be made a prerequisite for participation, and tools and procedures must be developed to facilitate both the elaboration, follow-up and evaluation. In the long run, the issue must be placed on the European political agenda and Member States must be engaged in a dialogue as to how it is most meaningfully tackled.

⁴⁰ Terms of Reference, p. 1

9. BIBLIOGRAPHY

The following books have been used in the construction of the theoretical framework on the basis of which the operational evaluation criteria were formulated:

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ANNEX 1:

Techne

QUESTIONNAIRE FOR PILOT COORDINATORS, JUNE 2007

Individual pupil mobility pilot scheme/Comenius subprogramme

Please return before Friday June 22 to: soren.kristensen@technemail.dk

1. THE PROJECT

- a. What has been the main challenge/difficulty with this project in the start-up phase?
- b. Do you see any structural problems at this stage that may cause problems with the implementation of activities now or in the future?
- c. Are you satisfied with the overall information flow in the project? If no – what should have been improved, and by whom?
- d. Would it have been possible to recruit more participants than the ones selected up to now? If yes – what changes in procedures/practices would be needed to achieve this?
- e. Do you see these activities (once they get established as a proper EU programme) as a possible competitor to the activities you are offering?
- f. Do you see or foresee any specific benefits for AFS/YFU in running this project for the European Commission?

2. SCHOOLS

- a. What are the main problems facing the sending schools in a project of this nature, and what kind of support do they need to be able to benefit from this project and the future new programme?
- b. What are the main problems facing the hosting schools, and what kind of support do they need in order to be able to benefit from this project and the future new programme?

2.1. Relationship with sending schools (in your own country)

- a. Who is in charge of pre-departure training?
 - Schools only
 - AFS/YFU pilot coordinator only

- Joint activity (please describe nature and distribution of tasks)
- Any significant exceptions from the general rule?

b. Who is involved in the ongoing monitoring of participants from your country while they are away?

- sending schools
- receiving schools
- AFS/YFU pilot coordinator in sending country
- AFS/YFU pilot coordinator in host country
- Combination
- Any significant exceptions from the general rule?

c. Who is in charge of debriefing of participants after the project?

- Schools only
- AFS/YFU pilot coordinator only
- Joint activity (please describe distribution of tasks)
- Any significant exceptions from the general rule

2.2. Relationship with hosting schools (in your own country)

a. Who selects host families?

- Schools
- AFS/YFU pilot coordinator
- Joint activity (please describe distribution of tasks)
- Any significant exceptions from the general rule?

b. Are you involved in any activities with visiting participants?

- Introduction/inception meetings
- Evaluation sessions
- Other activities
- Any significant exceptions from the general rule?

c. What is your role in the monitoring of incoming participants during the project

- Advisory only
- “Trouble-shooter” (only intervening in the event of serious trouble)
- Involved in all monitoring activities
- Any significant exceptions from the general rule?

3. COMENIUS NATIONAL AGENCIES

a. Have you had any contact with the Comenius National Agency in your country concerning this project? If yes, please describe the nature of this contact (meetings, sending copy of documents and correspondence, presence at training and debriefing sessions etc.)

b. Did the Comenius National Agency show any interest in this project (if yes – in what way?)

Thank you for your cooperation!

*Søren Kristensen
External evaluator*

ANNEX 2:

QUESTIONNAIRE

Hosting schools

Techne

Please return the completed questionnaire to the external evaluator via e-mail at (soren.kristensen@technemail.dk) by **Friday March 14**. Your answers will be treated confidentially, and any information used in the evaluation report will be anonymised. You can write your answers in English, German, French, Danish or Swedish.

Informant:

Are you a teacher/headmaster/other (e.g. administrative staff)?

Duration:

How long did the pupil stay at your school – 6 months/3 months/other (early return)?

Accommodation:

Was it the school that found the host family?

Contact person:

a. Was there a special contact person (teacher) for the pupil at the school?

b. If yes – did that person receive any compensation (time off/payment) for the work involved?

International contacts:

a. Do you remain in contact with the sending school?

b. Does the school often have projects of an international character, and are they part of a coherent internationalisation strategy?

Benefits:

What did you experience as the main benefits for the school of the project?

Problems:

What were the main problems encountered?

Evaluation:

a. Would the school be prepared to host a pupil from abroad again?

b. If no – what type of support would you need to become involved again?

Feel free to add comments on any other aspect that you deem relevant.

9. Annexes

9.1 Annex 1: Overview training events during exchange phase

AUSTRIA

A. Hosting activities

- *On arrival camp*

Trimester programme
Location: Jugendgästehaus Marc Aurel, Tulln
Date(s): Aug. 31 st – Sept. 2 nd 2007
Content/Methodology: AFS method (country specific information, preparation for intercultural learning experiences, discussions, workshops, organizational issues)

- *Language classes/camp*

Trimester programme
Location: Individually organized language classes in cooperation with hosting schools (private lessons)
Date(s): Sept. – Oct. 2007
Content/Methodology: Had been chosen by the teachers.

- *End of stay*

Trimester programme
Location: Jugendherberge Myrrthengasse, Vienna
Date(s): Nov. 27 th – Nov. 28 th 2007

Content/Methodology:
 AFS method (follow up and reflection of intercultural learning experiences, discussions, workshops, going back preparation)

B. Sending activities

- *Post-return activity*

Trimester programme	Semester programme
Location: Regionally organized (Vienna, Gmunden, Innsbruck)	Location: Same as Trimester programme
Date(s): Vienna: Feb. 22 nd 2008 Gmunden: Feb. 23 rd 2008 Innsbruck: Dec. 16 th 2007, Feb. 22 nd 2008	Date(s): Same as Trimester programme
Content/Methodology: AFS method (follow up and reflection of intercultural learning issues, exchanging experiences, preparing for reintegration)	Content/Methodology: Same as Trimester programme

BELGIUM-FLANDERS

A. Hosting activities

- *On arrival camp*

Trimester programme	Semester programme
Location: Leuven	Location: Leuven
Date(s): 25-28 Aug 2007	Date(s): 25-28 Aug 2007
Content/Methodology: Getting acquainted, my identity, about Flanders, going to school in Flanders, living in a host family, CD-rom language training, about AFS, safety tips, cultural discovery, learning about the local volunteer groups and their	Content/Methodology: Getting acquainted, my identity, about Flanders, going to school in Flanders, living in a host family, CD-rom language training, about AFS, safety tips, cultural discovery, learning about the local volunteer groups and their

activities	activities
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- *Language classes/camp*

Trimester programme	Semester programme
Location: Local	Location: Local
Date(s): 8 weeks, 2x 2 hours	Date(s): 8 weeks, 2x 2 hours
Content/Methodology: Self study + classes organized by AFS	Content/Methodology: Self study + classes organized by AFS

- *End of stay*

Trimester programme	Semester programme
Location: AFS office	Location: AFS office
Date(s): 13 Nov 2007	Date(s): 22 Jan 2008
Content/Methodology: My process of intercultural learning, I have changed and I return to a changed environment, evaluation of the process and programme	Content/Methodology: My process of intercultural learning, I have changed and I return to a changed environment, evaluation of the process and programme

B. Sending activities

- *Post-return activity*

Trimester programme
Location: Hasselt
Date(s): 22 Dec 2007
Content/Methodology: 'Cock and bull'-stories, happy families game, mobile game, about AFS, what happens now? questionnaire

BELGIUM-FRENCH

A. Hosting activities

- *On arrival camp*

Trimester programme
Location: Brussels
Date(s): 24-25-26 August
Content/Methodology: describe the support structure of AFS BFR discuss cultural differences and recognize the difference between a cultural generalization and a cultural stereotype discuss laws, cultural attitudes, and common behaviors in their new host culture and host community describe models of cultural adjustment and reflect upon ways to cope with the stress of adjusting to a new family, culture, school, etc identify one or more challenges/difficult situations they may face during the exchange experience and identify ways to help themselves identify sources of support and contact information for help in difficult situations identify and record one or more strategies for dealing with anticipated challenges

- *Language classes/camp*

Trimester programme
Location:
Date(s):
Content/Methodology: Students benefit from a budget of 150 Euros (reimbursement on presentation of a bill to our office) to attend French classes somewhere in

their host community. Their host family can surely help students to find the appropriate courses in the neighbourhood. These courses can be spread over several weeks.

- *Mid-stay*

Trimester programme
Location: Namur
Date(s): 6 October
Content/Methodology: express personal reactions to cultural differences, to their own exchange experience and integration in family, school, and community arenas discuss strategies to help deal with challenges experienced in family, school, and community arenas discuss value differences; discuss reactions to cultural differences identify one or more cultural differences they have observed between themselves and their host family identify several strategies for effective intercultural communication

- *End of stay*

Trimester programme
Location: Brussels
Date(s): 7 November
Content/Methodology: review the year's experience in terms of ups and downs and reflect on their initial expectations for the experience review their cultural adjustment progress from prior to departure to date reflect upon and share what they have learned

about: themselves, their home and host cultures, and their sending and host family. And how they will apply what they have learned in their own culture, family, ...

identify one or more ways to help mentally prepare for departure

discuss strategies for coping with challenges related to re-entry

reflect upon and share their expectations for the first days/weeks after their return

plan how to say “goodbye” and “thank you” to the host family - identify one or more ways to help themselves for the departure

B. Sending activities

- *Post-return activity*

Trimester programme
Location: Brussels
Date(s): 16 February
Content/Methodology: review their cultural adjustment progress from prior to departure to date reflect upon and record their current state of mind, how they are spending their time, the status of their relationships with others – family, friends, ... identify and share strategies for dealing with the challenges of re-entry (difficulties with family, school, ...) share elements of their experience abroad with others identify cultural differences they have observed between themselves and their host family in the areas of: including language use, perception, non-verbal communication, communication

style, patterns of thinking, and values

DENMARK

A. Hosting activities

- *On arrival camp*

Trimester programme	Semester programme
Location: The AFS house in Copenhagen	Location: The AFS house in Copenhagen
Date(s): August 31 st – September 2 nd 2007	Date(s): August 31 st – September 2 nd 2007
Content/Methodology: Language sessions, group discussions on culture, preparing meals together, Trip around Copenhagen to learn about culture, monetary system, public transportation, language. Done by Comenius coordinator and volunteers.	Content/Methodology: Language sessions, group discussions on culture, preparing meals together, Trip around Copenhagen to learn about culture, monetary system, public transportation, language. Done by Comenius coordinator and volunteers.

- *Language classes/camp*

(Language classes were done at arrival-camp and then at hosting-school locally. Some students were offered additional language classes locally.)

Trimester programme	Semester programme
Location: The AFS house in Copenhagen	Location: The AFS house in Copenhagen
Date(s): August 31 st – September 2 nd 2007 – and later	Date(s): August 31 st – September 2 nd 2007 – and later
Content/Methodology: Language material: “Lucy laerer dansk”. CD, text book and exercise book. All students received this material and 4 lessons of Danish language by experienced Language teacher. Since the teacher was present during the whole stay, teaching was also done individually throughout the camp.	Content/Methodology: Language material: “Lucy laerer dansk”. CD, text book and exercise book. All students received this material and 4 lessons of Danish language by experienced Language teacher. Since the teacher was present during the whole stay, teaching was also done individually throughout the camp.

- *End of stay*

Trimester programme	Semester programme
Location: Copenhagen Airport	Location: Copenhagen Airport
Date(s): The day of departure for each student	Date(s): The day of departure for each student

Content/Methodology: A questionnaire was forwarded to each student and the content of this and the student's experiences during the stay were discussed.	Content/Methodology: A questionnaire was forwarded to each student and the content of this and the student's experiences during the stay were discussed.
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B. Sending activities

- *Post-return activity*

Students were offered to join the 3-day post return camp for the AFS-programme year- students, since they also participated with the same students on the pre-departure orientation.

ESTONIA

A. Hosting activities

- *On arrival camp*

Trimester programme
Location: Tartu, Estonia
Date(s): 18 – 19.08. 2007
Content/Methodology: - Lectures that gave basic knowledge about: 1) Estonia, 2) Estonian language, 3) Estonian culture (visiting important places in Tartu), 4) Estonian school system, 5) Tutoring system during the programme, 6) Estonian family model, 7) Trimester programme (time schedules and other practical information, etc). Theory and practice combined as much as possible. Held by YFU Volunteer and Inbound students' coordinator.

- *Language classes/camp*

Trimester programme
Location: 1) Tartu, German Language Institute 2) Valga, Fundamental School
Date(s): 1) 20.09 – 01.11.2007 (once a week 2x45 minutes) 2) During school time, organized in cooperation with the school
Content/Methodology:

Estonian language course based on English, practical speech and grammar.

- *End of stay*

Trimester programme
Location: South of Estonia, small farm
Date(s): 20 –21.10. 2007
Content/Methodology: <ul style="list-style-type: none">- Combined with Mid –stay, as the students had a small meeting in between together with year students- What is important to know, when returning home from an exchange- What was the positive, negative, feedback on hosting families and schools + YFU as a hosting organization – group work and filling in feedback forms- Last 3 hours were spent together with host families, having more discussions about the time together- Lead by YFU volunteers

B. Sending activities

- *Post-return activity*

Trimester programme
Location: South of Estonia, tourism facility
Date(s): 26-27.01.2008
Content/Methodology: <ul style="list-style-type: none">- Combined with year and semester students who arrived in December 2007.- Discussions about the exchange year and its values- Discussions about home coming and preparation- Discussions about future plans- Presentation for becoming a volunteer and sharing experiences with others- Lead by YFU volunteers

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FINLAND

A. Hosting activities

- *On arrival camp*

Trimester programme	Semester programme
Location: local, together with regular AFS-students	Location: local, together with regular AFS-students
Date(s): August-September	Date(s): August-September
Content/Methodology: Group and small group activities	Content/Methodology: Group and small group activities

- *Language classes/camp*

Trimester programme	Semester programme
Location: language classes locally	Location: language classes locally
Date(s): during the whole period of stay	Date(s): during the whole period of stay
Content/Methodology: Depending on the teacher	Content/Methodology: Depending on the teacher

- *End of stay*

Trimester programme	Semester programme
Location: Helsinki	Location: Helsinki
Date(s): Mid. November	Date(s): Mid. February
Content/Methodology: Group activities, small group activities, discussions	Content/Methodology: Group activities, small group activities, discussions

B. Sending activities

- *Post-return activity*

Trimester programme	Semester programme
Location: Helsinki	Location: Helsinki (together with other AFS-returnees)
Date(s): Mid January	Date(s): March
Content/Methodology: Group activities, small groups, peer discussions	Content/Methodology: Group activities, small groups, peer discussions

FRANCE

A. Hosting activities

- *On arrival camp*

Trimester programme	Semester programme
Location: JAL MUTATIS Achères 25 rue du 8 mai 78260 Achères - FRANCE	Location: INJEP Marly Le Roy 11 rue Paul Leplat 78160 Marly le roi - FRANCE
Dates : 29-31/ 08 / 2008	Dates : 29-31/ 08 / 2008
Contents / methodology: - The local volunteers gather the students in small groups (no more than ten people) and by language (usually English, Spanish, German and Italian). By using our Orientation booklet (Welcome to France), the volunteers offer the students an overview of what their everyday life in France would be. - 3h bus tour around Paris	Contents/ methodology: - The local volunteers gather the students in small groups (no more than ten people) by language(usually English, Spanish, German and Italian). By using our Orientation booklet (Welcome to France), the volunteers offer the students an overview of what their everyday life in France would be. - 3h bus tour around Paris

- *Language classes/camp*

Trimester programme	Semester programme
Location: local	Location: local

Date(s): first weeks of the programme	Date(s): first weeks of the programme
Content/Methodology: Depending on language teacher	Content/Methodology: Depending on language teacher

- *End of stay*

Trimester programme	Semester programme
Location: Résidence internationale de Paris 41 rue Louis Lumière 75020 Paris - France	Location: Résidence internationale de Paris 41 rue Louis Lumière 75020 Paris – France
Date(s): 24-25/11/2007	Date(s): 01-02 /02/2008
Content/Methodology: - In small groups (no more than ten people and with all the nationalities mixed up), the students spoke about their experience in French. - Talent show	Content/Methodology: - In small groups (no more than ten people and with all the nationalities mixed up), the students spoke about their experience in French. - Talent show

B. Sending activities

- *Post-return activity*

Trimester programme	Semester programme
Location: local	Location: local
Date(s): few weeks after returning	Date(s): few weeks after returning
Content/Methodology: - In small groups reflecting on the experience and offering a possibility to discuss reverse culture shock	Content/Methodology: - In small groups reflecting on the experience and offering a possibility to discuss reverse culture shock

GERMANY (YFU)

A. Hosting activities

- *On arrival camp*

Trimester programme	Semester programme
Location: Magdeburg	Location: Magdeburg
Date(s): 05. – 08. September 2007	Date(s): 05. – 08. September 2007
Content/Methodology: Differences between cultures, German way of life, school system Living in a host family, communication Methods: small groups, plenary, discussions	Content/Methodology: Differences between cultures, German way of life, school system Living in a host family, communication Methods: small groups, plenary, discussions

- *Language classes/camp*

Trimester programme	Semester programme
Location: locally	Location: locally
Date(s): divers	Date(s): divers
Content/Methodology: divers	Content/Methodology: divers

- *End of stay*

Trimester programme	Semester programme
Location: Berlin	Location: Berlin
Date(s): 07. – 08. December 2007	Date(s): 07. – 10. February 2008
Content/Methodology: Review, Farewell, Individual change, outlook Methods: Small groups, discussions	Content/Methodology: Review, Farewell, Individual change, outlook Methods: Small groups, discussions

B. Sending activities

- *Post-return activity*

Trimester programme	Semester programme
Location: Bad Hersfeld	Location: Bad Hersfeld
Date(s): 18. – 20. April 2008	Date(s): 18. – 20. April 2008
Content/Methodology: Reflection on exchange experience, difficulties at re-entry and prospects for the time after the experience (how can the students and their surroundings profit from the experiences abroad in the long run). Method: Guided discussion groups of 10-12 students. The students search for and find the answers themselves.	Content/Methodology: Reflection on exchange experience, difficulties at re-entry and prospects for the time after the experience (how can the students and their surroundings profit from the experiences abroad in the long run). Method: Guided discussion groups of 10-12 students. The students search for and find the answers themselves.

GERMANY (AFS)

A. Hosting activities

- *On arrival camp*

Trimester programme	Semester programme
Location: Essen (near airport)	Location: Essen (near airport)
Date(s): 7 th to 9 th September 2007	Date(s): 7 th to 9 th September 2007
Content/Methodology: typical AFS on arrival camp with cultural/geographical/political aspects, explanation of school system/AFS structure/safety tips and workshops for intercultural sensibility; some language training	Content/Methodology: typical AFS on arrival camp with cultural/geographical/political aspects, explanation of school system/AFS structure/safety tips and workshops for intercultural sensibility; some language training

- *Language classes/camp*

Trimester programme	Semester programme
Location: Essen + self study at home + school	Location: Essen + self study at home + school
Date(s): 7.-9. September + ongoing	Date(s): 7.-9. September + ongoing

Content/Methodology: language classes/training at on arrival camp according to previous knowledge + self study CD with 200 exercises on it + internet links before arrival + language training offered by school (where applicable)	Content/Methodology: language classes/training at on arrival camp according to previous knowledge + self study CD with 200 exercises on it + internet links before arrival + language training offered by school (where applicable)
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- *End of stay*

Trimester programme	Semester programme
Location: Ratingen (near airport)	Location: regional
Date(s): 7 th to 8 th December 2007	Date(s): end of January 2008 (about three weeks before return)
Content/Methodology: one day End of Stay Camp with overnight stay with workshops and discussions for self-reflection/assessment of the past, present and future intercultural learning experience	Content/Methodology: regular two-day End of Stay Camp with other semester students with workshops/discussions for self-reflection/assessment of the past, present and future intercultural learning experience

B. Sending activities

- *Post-return activity*

Trimester programme
Location: Two regional locations (Mainz/Wuppertal)
Date(s): 2 nd and 23 rd February 2008 (one day each)
Content/Methodology: regular AFS re-entry seminar with discussions/games/workshops for self-reflection/assessment of past intercultural learning experience, present social/emotional/educational situation and future learning opportunities

HUNGARY

A. Hosting activities

- *On arrival camp*

Trimester programme	Semester programme
Location: Dunaharaszti	Location: Dunaharaszti
Date(s): 24-26 August, 2007	Date(s): 31 August – 2 September, 2007
Content/Methodology: 2-day AFS orientation conducted by AFS staff and volunteers Host culture, country, family, school information and expectations - Group work, games, role plays, presentation	Content/Methodology: 2-day AFS orientation conducted by AFS staff and volunteers Host culture, country, family, school information and expectations - Group work, games, role plays, presentation

- *Language classes/camp*

Trimester programme	Semester programme
Location: local	Location: local
Date(s): ongoing	Date(s): ongoing during the first 3 months
Content/Methodology: Hungarian grammar and spoken Hungarian Role plays, written exercises, language booklet	Content/Methodology: Hungarian grammar and spoken Hungarian Role plays, written exercises, language booklet

- *End of stay*

Trimester programme	Semester programme
Location: Budapest – Hotel Touring	Location: Budapest – AFS Office
Date(s): 17-18 November, 2007	Date(s): 7 February, 2008
Content/Methodology: 2-day AFS orientation conducted by AFS staff and volunteers Closing the year, preparing for “Say Good Byes!”, fears and hopes about returning to home country - Group work, games, role plays, presentation, evaluation	Content/Methodology: 1-day AFS orientation conducted by AFS staff and a volunteer Closing the year, preparing for “Say Good Byes!”, fears and hopes about returning to home country - Games, role plays, presentation, evaluation

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B. Sending activities

- *Post-return activity*

Trimester programme	Semester programme
Location: Hotel Touring	Location: Hotel Touring
Date(s): 2-3 February, 2008	Date(s): late April with regular AFS students
Content/Methodology: 2-day AFS re-orientation (group works, intercultural games, AFS volunteer and training possibilities in the future) conducted by AFS staff and volunteers.	Content/Methodology: 2-day AFS re-orientation (group works, intercultural games, AFS volunteer and training possibilities in the future) conducted by AFS staff and volunteers.

ITALY

A. Hosting activities

- *On arrival camp*

Trimester programme	Semester programme
Location: Hotel Divino Amore "Casa del Pellegrino" Via del Santuario, 4 (Ardeatina km 12) 00134 ROMA	Location: Hotel Divino Amore "Casa del Pellegrino" Via del Santuario, 4 (Ardeatina km 12) 00134 ROMA
Date(s): 5 – 6 September	Date(s): 5 – 6 September
Content/Methodology: <ul style="list-style-type: none"> - Welcome - Explanation of Comenius Pilot Programme and organizations involved (EFIL, AFS, EEE-YFU, YFU) - Orientation sessions regarding first period in the host family/community/school, student expectations/doubts/fears, etc. - Intercultura rules and Safety Tips - Administrative procedures - Logistics for travel to host community 	Content/Methodology: <ul style="list-style-type: none"> - Welcome - Explanation of Comenius Pilot Programme and organizations involved (EFIL, AFS, EEE-YFU, YFU) - Orientation sessions regarding first period in the host family/community/school, student expectations/doubts/fears, etc. - Intercultura rules and Safety Tips - Administrative procedures - Logistics for travel to host community

- *Language classes/camp*

Trimester programme	Semester programme
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Location: Local level	Location: Local level
Date(s): Approx. start date: 20 September. Lessons organized for 40 hours. End date depended on the organization of the course on a local level.	Date(s): Approx. start date: 20 September. Lessons organized for 40 hours. End date depended on the organization of the course on a local level.
Content/Methodology: Courses organized on a local level with an individual teacher or with a school. The content was based on the students' knowledge and progress.	Content/Methodology: Courses organized on a local level with an individual teacher or with a school. The content was based on the students' knowledge and progress.

- *Mid-stay*

Trimester programme	Semester programme
Location: Regional	Location: Regional
Date(s): Mid October	Date(s): Mid October
Content/Methodology: This Orientation weekend includes: group activities on family life, school adjustment, socialization, intercultural education, evaluation of first part of stay through group activities and personal interview with volunteers.	Content/Methodology: This Orientation weekend includes: group activities on family life, school adjustment, socialization, intercultural education, evaluation of first part of stay through group activities and personal interview with volunteers.

- *End of stay*

Trimester programme	Semester programme
Location: Torre Rossa Park Via Torre Rossa 94 00165 Roma	Location: Villa Aurelia Via Leone XIII 459 00165 Roma
Date(s): 8 – 9 December	Date(s): 9 – 10 February
Content/Methodology: This serves to evaluate the students, their experience and how much of the language and culture they had learned, as well as to prepare them for their return home. It also gives the students a chance to be together one last time to learn and share with each other thoughts about their experiences.	Content/Methodology: This serves to evaluate the students, their experience and how much of the language and culture they had learned, as well as to prepare them for their return home. It also gives the students a chance to be together one last time to learn and share with each other thoughts about their experiences.

B. Sending activities

- *Post-return activity*

Trimester programme	Semester programme
Location: Local level	Location: Local level
Date(s): There is no specific date	Date(s): There is no specific date
Content/Methodology: Pupils who participated in the study programme abroad were invited by the local volunteer groups of the intermediary organisation to meetings where they had the possibility to share their experiences and express their feelings about the “re-entry shock” in their native country. Pupils were also invited to reflect upon the intercultural experience they had lived.	Content/Methodology: Pupils who participated in the study programme abroad were invited by the local volunteer groups of the intermediary organisation to meetings where they had the possibility to share their experiences and express their feelings about the “re-entry shock” in their native country. Pupils were also invited to reflect upon the intercultural experience they had lived.

PORTUGAL

A. Hosting activities

- *On arrival camp*

Trimester programme
Location: Lisboa
Date(s): September 7-9
Content/Methodology: <ul style="list-style-type: none"> - Host and orientate the participants on the experience of an intercultural exchange in our country; - Promote reflection and develop competences on Intercultural Learning. - Introduce the participants to our organization and to the IPM pilot; - Introduce the participants to Portuguese culture; - Introduction to Intercultural Learning; - To stimulate awareness and

<p>development of competences on Intercultural Learning.</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> - Plenary presentation, interrogative method, small group questionnaire, plenary debate, introduction to Portuguese language by presentations and pedagogical games, small groups discussion, role-play.

- *Language classes/camp*

Trimester programme
Location: Host Schools
Date(s): Along the programme
Content/Methodology:

- *End of stay*

Trimester programme
Location: Almada (Costa Azul)
Date(s): November 30th – December 2nd
Content/Methodology: <ul style="list-style-type: none"> - To deepen the participants knowledge on the process of intercultural learning; - To stimulate the participants awareness on the acquired intercultural skills and their permanent development. - To evaluate intercultural learning experiences lived by participants throughout the pilot; - To reflect upon the different acquired learnings; - To prepare the return home and consequent re-entry cultural shock. - Interviews, reflection, questionnaires, small group discussions.

Note: Portugal hosted 1 participant on a semester basis. He had the same kind of training and an individual end of stay session before departure.

B. Sending activities

- *Post-return activity*

Trimester programme
Location: Seixal (Costa Azul)
Date(s): January 11-13
Content/Methodology: <ul style="list-style-type: none">- To consolidate acquired intercultural skills by the participants;- To integrate the participants in the organization.- To promote a reflection and evaluation on the educational experience through which participants had constant contact with a different country day-by-day;- To promote awareness of the learning and challenges resulting from the confrontation between different cultures;- To promote learning of skills towards active citizenship;- To motivate the pupils to become AFS volunteers.- Presentations, sharing in pairs, drawing, plenary discussion, individual reflection, shared reflection, role-play.

9.2 Annex 2: Final report template



Final Report for Comenius Individual Pupil Mobility Pilot Sending schools

Your school participated in the Comenius individual pupil mobility pilot project, which prepares the launch of a new Comenius action in 2008. The information that you provide in this report will be very valuable for the preparation of the new action so please answer carefully to all questions in the report.

Please note that the final report must be submitted within three weeks after the return of the pupil(s)!

The final report includes a narrative section for the sending school (parts I and II) and the pupil (III) and a financial part (part V). Failure to accomplish the reporting obligations entitles EFIL to demand full reimbursement of sums already paid.

Results and achievements justifying the payment of the grant must be described in detail in the narrative report. Travel costs and special costs must be fully justified with boarding passes and/or used travel tickets and/or invoices or acceptable accounting receipts. The monthly allowance is a flat-rate grant amount and no receipts for this amount need to be submitted.

The final calculation of the grant will be based on the actual number of pupils, the actual duration of the mobility period(s) and actual eligible costs.

Details of the beneficiary organisation (= Sending school)	
Name	_____
Street address	_____
Postcode	_____
City	_____
	Country _____
Email	Website _____
Telephone	Telefax _____
Person to contact for questions on this report (contact person)	
Family name (Mr/Ms)	_____
First name	_____
Position/function	_____
Email	_____
Telephone	_____
Official name(s) of your partner school(s) hosting the pupil(s)	

Name(s) of the participating pupil(s)	



Signature of the legal representative	
<i>I the undersigned hereby certify that all the information contained in this final report is accurate.</i>	
<i>The parties allow EFIL and the European Commission to make available and use all data provided in this report for the purposes of managing the Comenius Individual Pupil Mobility Pilot. The data, on paper or electronically, will always be used respecting the privacy of individual persons.</i>	
Beneficiary organisation	
Name, stamp :	
Legal representative	
Name in capital letters :	
Place, date :	Signature :

Part I Sending school report

This part I is to be filled in by the sending school. If you have sent out more than one pupil, please fill in a separate report for each pupil.

Sending school :	
Name of the pupil :	
Host country:	

Overall rating

<i>Please check one box only for each question</i>					
	Very good	Good	Average	Bad	Very bad
To what extent were you satisfied with your overall cooperation with the host school?	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
To what extent were you satisfied with your overall cooperation with the pupil?	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
To what extent were you satisfied with you cooperation with the national AFS or YFU organisation responsible for the organisation of the exchange?	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
How would you rate the overall success of the project?	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
How long was the exchange?	3 months <input type="checkbox"/> 6 months <input type="checkbox"/>				
How do you consider the length of the exchange	too long <input type="checkbox"/> too short <input type="checkbox"/> just right <input type="checkbox"/>				

In you answers below, do not hesitate to mention difficulties and problems you have encountered and other matters that you consider helpful for other schools, which would participate in similar exchanges in the future.

A. Overall evaluation of the exchange

How would you describe your overall cooperation with the host school and the pupil? Did the exchange produce any unforeseen results (positive or negative?)

B. Training and support

How would you evaluate the preparation and support provided to the pupil(s) by the national AFS or YFU organisations (intercultural preparation, language training, personal support, administrative support, etc)?

Part II Sending school report

This part II is to be filled in by the sending school. You only need to fill it once, even if you have sent out several pupils.

A. Outcome of the exchange

Please describe what you believe you achieved with this pilot project in relation with e.g.:

- the cooperation with the host school(s),

- the European/international dimension of your school's activities,

- the personal development of the pupil(s),

- the education provided by the host school

Would you like to send or host pupils in the future? Yes No Possibly

Would you recommend Individual Pupil Mobility to other Comenius schools? Yes No

Please explain:

Describe how you have evaluated the exchange with your pupil(s) or how you will evaluate it:

B. Conclusions

Please describe any specific difficulties that you encountered in implementing this exchange. Give any additional information, observations, comments or recommendations that may be useful for the organisation of future exchanges.



Part III. Pupil report

Please note that each pupil having participated in the pilot must fill in this report!

Contact details of the pupil (home address)	
Family name (Mr/Ms) _____	First name _____
Street address _____	
Postcode _____	City _____
Country _____	
Telephone _____	Email _____

Host country:
Mother tongue of the pupil:
Teaching language in the host school:

Overall rating

<i>Please check one box only for each question</i>	 Very good	Good	Average	Bad	 Very bad
How would you rate the overall pupil mobility experience?	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
To what extent were you satisfied with the host school?	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
To what extent were you satisfied with the host family?	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
To what extent were you satisfied with the training and support offered by the AFS or YFU organisation in your country?	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
To what extent are you satisfied with the monthly grant that you received?	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
To what extent were you satisfied with the training and support offered by the AFS or YFU organisation in the host country?	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
How would you evaluate the preparatory meetings in your home country?	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
How would you evaluate the language classes and intercultural workshops in the host country?	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
How long was the exchange?	3 months <input type="checkbox"/> 6 months <input type="checkbox"/>				
How do you consider the length of the exchange	too long <input type="checkbox"/> too short <input type="checkbox"/> just right <input type="checkbox"/>				

A. Overall evaluation

What were your expectations when applying for this exchange? Where these expectations met?

What is your overall evaluation of your stay abroad?

B. Support

How did you keep in touch with your sending school during the exchange? Were you able to contact them when you had problems?

C. Personal development

Please describe what you have gained from this exchange in terms of:

- perception of the host country

- school achievements

- language training

- personal development

Part IV. Financial report (All items in euros)

Travel costs and special costs must be fully justified with boarding passes and/or used travel tickets and/or invoices or acceptable accounting receipts. The monthly allowance is a flat-rate grant amount and no receipts for this amount need to be submitted.

Travel costs				
Name of the pupil	From	To	Means of transport	Costs
<i>TOTAL</i>				

Monthly allowance				
Name of the pupil	Host country	Number of months	Monthly allowance	Total Costs
<i>TOTAL</i>				

Special costs (if applicable)	
Specification	Costs
<i>TOTAL</i>	

Please consult your grant agreement for accepted amounts.

	Total amount as stated in the grant agreement	Final costs
Grant awarded		
Travel costs (100% of actual costs)		
Monthly allowance pupil(s)		
Special costs (actual costs) – if applicable		
Total grant awarded		

Payments	
Pre-financing payment already received from EFIL	

9.3 Annex 3: European Mobility Quality Charter

Focusing on the quality aspects of mobility, the European Quality Charter for Mobility constitutes a reference document for stays abroad in order to ensure that participants, both young people and adults, have a positive experience. Its scope covers stays by young people and adults for the purposes of both formal and non-formal learning and hence for their personal and professional development. It offers guidance designed to respond to participants' expectations and the legitimate requirements of education bodies and institutions. The Charter thus provides a better framework for free movement of persons in the field of education and training, so as to consolidate the creation of a true European area of education and training and enhance economic, social and regional cohesion.

ACT

Recommendation (EC) No 2006/961 of the European Parliament and of the Council of 18 December 2006 on transnational mobility within the Community for education and training purposes: European Quality Charter for Mobility [Official Journal L 394 of 30.12.2006].

SUMMARY

The European Quality Charter for Mobility constitutes the quality reference document for education and training stays abroad. It complements, from the quality point of view, the 2001 Recommendation on mobility for students, persons undergoing training, volunteers, teachers and trainers and has the same scope.

The Charter is addressed to the Member States, particularly their organisations responsible for stays abroad, and provides guidance on mobility arrangements for learning or other purposes, such as professional betterment, to both young and adult participants. This is in order to enhance personal and professional development. By involving the stakeholders more, it also aims to improve the quality and efficiency of education and training systems.

It should help to ensure that mobility participants always have a positive experience both in the host country and in their country of origin on their return, and that the number and depth of education and training exchanges are stepped up. It offers guidance designed to respond to:

- participants' expectations as regards pre-departure information, suitable infrastructure in the host country and the exploitation of acquired knowledge following their return to their country of origin;
- the legitimate requirements of education bodies and institutions, mainly in the host country, which expect that mobility participants will not arrive without being properly prepared and that their mobility period will be positive both for themselves and for the host body, institution or company.

This guidance consists of **ten principles** implemented on a voluntary and flexible basis, being adaptable to the nature and peculiarities of each stay. These principles are:

- **information and guidance:** every candidate should have access to clear and reliable sources of information and guidance on mobility and the conditions in which it can be taken up, including details of the Charter itself and the roles of sending and hosting organisations;
- **learning plan:** a plan is drawn up and signed by the sending and hosting organisations and participants before every stay for education or training purposes. It must describe the objectives and expected outcomes, the means of achieving them, and evaluation, and must also take account of reintegration issues;
- **personalisation:** mobility must fit in with personal learning pathways, skills and motivation of participants, and should develop or supplement them;
- **general preparation:** before departure, participants should receive general preparation tailored to their specific needs and covering linguistic, pedagogical, legal, cultural or financial aspects;
- **linguistic aspects:** language skills make for more effective learning, intercultural communication and a better understanding of the host country's culture. Arrangements should therefore include a pre-departure assessment of language skills, the possibility of attending courses in the language of the host country and/or language learning and linguistic support and advice in the host country;
- **logistical support:** this could include providing participants with information and assistance concerning travel arrangements, insurance, the portability of government grants and loans, residence or work permits, social security and any other practical aspects;
- **mentoring:** the hosting organisation should provide mentoring to advise and help participants throughout their stay, also to ensure their integration;
- **recognition:** if periods of study or training abroad are an integral part of a formal study or training programme, the learning plan must mention this, and participants should be provided with assistance regarding recognition and certification. For other types of mobility, and particularly those in the context of non-formal education and training, certification by an appropriate document, such as the [Europass](#), is necessary;
- **reintegration and evaluation:** on returning to their country of origin, participants should receive guidance on how to make use of the competences acquired during their stay and, following a long stay, any necessary help with reintegration. Evaluation of the experience acquired should make it possible to assess whether the aims of the learning plan have been achieved;
- **commitments and responsibilities:** the responsibilities arising from these quality criteria must be agreed and, in particular, confirmed in writing by all sides (sending and hosting organisations and participants).

Implementation of the Charter includes the elimination by the Member States of mobility obstacles and the provision of support and infrastructures to help raise education and training levels in the European Union (EU). It also includes measures to promote mobility by providing easily accessible information.

The Commission is called upon to encourage application of the Charter in the Member States, to continue to cooperate with the Member States and social partners, particularly with regard to the exchange of information and experience relating to the implementation of measures, and to develop statistical data on mobility.

Implementation of the Charter and its evaluation are part of the Education and Training 2010 work programme.

Background

Mobility has an important impact in that, as part of the freedom of movement of persons, it is a means of promoting employment, reducing poverty, and promoting active European citizenship by improving mutual and intercultural understanding in the EU and boosting economic, social and regional cohesion.

As an objective of the Education and Training 2010 work programme, mobility contributes to the creation of the European Area of Education and Training and plays an essential part in achieving the Lisbon strategic objectives . Mobility and an increase in exchanges are promoted through measures such as the 2000 action plan for mobility and the above-mentioned 2001 Recommendation on mobility for students, persons undergoing vocational training, volunteers and teachers , as well as events such as the 2006 European Year of Worker's Mobility. The Charter consolidates and complements these measures and the Erasmus Student Charter from the quality point of view.