

EU twinning in Ukraine

Results of a vocational education and training cooperation in an unsettled environment

CHRISTIANE EBERHARDT

Dr., Research associate in the "Basic Issues of Internationalisation/Monitoring of Vocational Education and Training Systems" Division at BIBB

ISABELLE LE MOUILLOUR

Head of the "Basic Issues of Internationalisation/Monitoring of Vocational Education and Training Systems" Division at BIBB

Vocational education and training in Ukraine was in upheaval even before the political events of the last year. In the year 2012 an EU twinning project was set up by the EU Commission and the Ministry of Education and Science of Ukraine with a view to supporting reform processes. Results and experiences from this two-year international cooperation are presented.

Vocational education and training in upheaval

As in many countries, Ukrainian vocational education and training suffers from a poor reputation and is considered a stopgap for those who cannot go to university. The vocational education and training system does not incorporate occupational career-progression pathways nor accessible routes into higher education. The 2010 placement rate recorded a mere 6.7 percent of young people choosing vocational establishments. In parallel, the ILO Labour Force Survey for the same year forecast a level of demand for skilled workers which can only be 40 per cent satisfied by vocational provision, even in the medium term (cf. text of tender document UA EU ENPI 2011, p. 3¹). Another problem is that vocational education and training and the world of work coexist alongside each other but are largely disconnected. Occupational skill-profiles ("occupational standards") do not exist or in many cases are not reflected in the initial vocational training standards, i. e. vocational school courses ("educational standards").

The Ukraine twinning project

The EU twinning project "Modernisation of legal standards and principles for vocational education in line with the European policy on lifelong learning" was set up in 2012. (For general information on EU twinning projects, cf. box below). The objective was to advise decision-makers from politics and public administration on drawing up an education act, to bring about implementation of a Ukrainian qualifications framework and to work through the quality assurance and standards development questions that arose in the process of developing vocational curricula in

five economic sectors. Other aims were to promote workplace-based learning, to promote social partnership as the steering mechanism in vocational education and thus to forge stronger links between the "world of education" and the "world of work".

On the Ukrainian side, a broad alliance from politics and research threw their weight behind the project (cf. box on project partners, below). Assistance from EU Member States came from a Danish-German consortium consisting of Denmark's National Centre for Vocational Education (METROPOL) and the vocational education centre Aarhus-tech along with BIBB. The project was launched in January 2013 and because of the political situation in February/March 2014 its term was extended until April 2015.

Dynamics and first milestones in the reform process

The Maidan events at the end of 2013 gave the project a major boost. Not only did the political turmoil result in a government that was receptive to the twinning project; it also directed overall attention towards the necessity for reforms in vocational education and training. Presumably the existence of this European project conveyed some symbolic strength – both domestically and in the direction of Brussels. This was manifested in the immense steps that were set in train and presented at the final conference in March 2015:

1. New educational legislation was outlined by preparing draft bills "On the amendment of certain legal acts on vocational education". The draft laws are aimed at measures for decentralisation: for instance, some steering tasks are delegated to local authorities, who will assume responsibility for adjusting the provision of vocational education to demand in the regional labour market. To this end, vocational schools will be amalgamated into

¹ URL: www.esteri.it/mae/gemellaggi/tacis/ucraina/ua_11_enp_pca_so_33%20modernization%20of%20legislative%20standards%20in%20lifelong%20learning.pdf

EU twinning projects

EU twinning projects are implemented within the programme "Institution-building in the new EU Member States and neighbouring countries". Unlike the familiar European programmes for vocational education and training (Leonardo, Erasmus+), twinning is explicitly addressed to public administrations and state institutions which promote corresponding measures for institution building and knowledge transfer, within a partnership process, predominantly at administrative level.

A hallmark of twinning projects is that a long-term expert coordinates the project implementation in cooperation with a designated in-country official.

Project partners in Ukraine

- Ministry of Education and Science (project leadership)
- Ministry of Economic Development and Trade
- Ministry of Social Policy
- Parliamentary Committee on Science and Education
- National Agency for Civil Service
- Employers' organisation
- Institute of Vocational Training of the National Academy of Pedagogical Sciences
- Institute for Innovative Technologies and Educational Content of Ukraine
- Regional vocational education, training and methodology centres.

large education and training centres operating across occupational fields. The draft law "On vocational education and training" documents the vocational qualifications at Levels 1 to 5 of the Ukrainian Qualifications Framework and a procedure for the accreditation/authorisation of vocational schools. It introduces a new autonomy for vocational schools and the possibility of generating financial resources which can be spent at their own discretion. Beyond this, a draft resolution of the Ministry of Education and Science of Ukraine "On an amended procedure for the provision of work placements in production and for the practical training of vocational school pupils" was passed.

2. The basic features of the Ukrainian qualifications framework having been outlined at the beginning of the project, guidelines were developed to facilitate the assignment of qualifications to levels. An appendix deals with the integration of informal and non-formal competences. The levels of the qualifications framework, and the related approach of linking initial vocational training standards with occupational standards, were enshrined in law as Article 23 of the draft law "On vocational education and training". Furthermore, a procedure was approved for assessing individuals' skills and knowledge as a prerequisite for access to retraining programmes or advanced vocational training. The purpose of this procedure is to formalise competences acquired informally and non-formally so that these can be located within the education system.
3. Approval was also granted to methodological recommendations for developing curricular standards, which were drafted in collaboration with the Danish partners in selected vocational fields. Modular, competence-based standards for six occupations will be piloted for the first time in the vocational training establishments from August 2015.

Lasting effects of the twinning project

The results can be expected to influence Ukraine's vocational education and training in the medium term. It would be presumptuous to ascribe all the system-relevant impacts described here to the twinning project alone. Nevertheless, it demonstrates how international cooperation can take effect:

1. It gives impulses.
2. It enables feedback on an equal footing and backing for new ideas.
3. It brings together partners within the country who have never or barely cooperated with each other before.
4. It improves visibility within the country so that the activities are noticed and taken seriously by broader groups.

Building on this experience, the Ministry of Education and Science of Ukraine set up a pilot project for the introduction of dualised initial vocational training, which will be launched in three regions (Zaporozhye, Lviv and Kiev) and three occupational fields in September 2015. The work is being carried out cooperation with the joint committee of the Ukraine employers' organisations, which has founded its own vocational education and training institute during the twinning period and declared itself willing to play a substantial part in the shaping of vocational education and training. More than 1,000 Ukrainian vocational education and training experts (vocational school heads, teachers, social partners and representatives from universities in ministries) were involved in the twinning; more than 20 peer learning activities, seminars and training courses as well as five study visits to Denmark or Germany took place, along with a workshop series on capacity building with the Institute of Vocational Training of the National Academy of Pedagogical Sciences. This exchange of knowledge and ideas is irreversible, and herein resides the potential that is essential – in addition to the legal foundations – to contribute to sustainable reform of Ukraine's vocational education and training system. ◀