



The Newsletter of the Association for Sandwich Education & Training

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Comment

April 1989 marks the beginning of a new era for higher education. Polytechnics and Colleges have now become independent of local authorities; like Universities they will be self-managing and will be financed by a new central body, the Polytechnics and Colleges Funding Council. The University Grants Committee (UGC) gives way to the University Funding Council, a smaller body, with greater non-academic involvement, and directly responsible to Parliament. Issues of student vouchers, top-up loans and graduate tax, the plan to concentrate research funds on some universities to the exclusion of others - the rest competing for funds based on contracts to provide courses and on student numbers (as the Polys and Colleges must now do) are being proposed. In any event it is now clear that Industry will have a much greater role in higher education governance and expects to ease its problems of skills shortages - already apparent in the graduate market where the number of vacancies in 1989 exceeds the supply.

Within this development of higher education ASET is ideally placed to make an important contribution. One of its principal aims is to "encourage co-operation between employing organisations and higher education institutions". ASET regards sandwich education as increasingly relevant, the product of the system is in great demand; indeed the launch last year of the Enterprise in Higher Education programme put great emphasis on students gaining "direct experience of the world of work". We trust that we shall see 1989 as the beginning of a new era for ASET.

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COMETT PROGRAMME: The first two years of student placements in industry abroad.

Operational since 1st January 1987, the COMETT Programme for university-enterprise cooperation in the field of training for technologies and their applications, established by the Council in July 1986, has had a considerable response throughout the Community. In fact, universities and enterprises (including many small and medium-sized enterprises) in their hundreds, as well as many other important agents of development such as the social partners, chambers of commerce and industry etc. have submitted to the Commission transnational cooperative training projects, for both initial and continuing training.

Of greatest significance to the sandwich education community are Strand A, involving the establishment of a European Network of University-Enterprise Training Partnerships (UETPs) and Strand B of the programme, the development of transnational exchanges to enable students or recent graduates to be placed on training assignments with an enterprise in another member state. Yet another provision of Strand B enables a supervisor, either from an industry or a university, to go to an enterprise or university in another member state.

The results obtained in 1987 and 1988 bore witness to the response: 125 university-enterprise training partnerships (UETPs), almost 400 exchange programmes benefitting 2,500 students and more than 120 senior university and enterprise personnel, almost 200 joint continuing training projects, and 90 multilateral training projects using multimedia systems. It was only the limited financial resources allocated by the Budget Authority in 1987 and 1988 that prevented other projects of equal merit being accepted from within the 4,000 projects submitted.

The essential strategic objectives of the Community - the completion, within the framework of the Single Act, of the Internal Market in 1992, the development of a Europe of Technology, and the reinforcement of its internal economic and social cohesion - highlight the importance of human resources within overall investment, both material and non-material, for growth. In the respect, COMETT is contributing to the strengthening of the scientific and technological base of European industry and its international competitiveness, while also forming part of Cooperation between universities and enterprises is a key instrument in this context and for the mutual benefit of both.

Student Placements in Enterprises Abroad

During the first year of operation in 1987 some 300 applications were submitted under Strand B the applications being dominated by the UK and France; not only with regard to the number of applications, 90 for France and 70 for the UK, but also referring to the number of students actually being exchanged. Of 1067 students in the community who were placed in another member state the UK sent 290 students abroad and received 266. The corresponding figures for 1988 were 261 sent and 237 received from a total of 1240 students. Comett programme officials attribute the high profile of the UK and France in student placement projects to existing practices of sandwich courses as well as to the importance of the language issue.

The Commission's Proposals for COMETT II

The Commission approved in July 1988 the text of a Draft Decision which is intended to form the basis of a second 5 year phase of COMETT - COMETT II. This is not just a simple continuation of the existing

programme. It is both a deepening and broadening of COMETT I.

It is a deepening in two senses: on the one hand, by greater targeting of the actions proposed on the changing requirements of enterprises and sectors for advanced qualifications and training (especially the small and medium enterprises); on the other hand, by increasing support particularly for COMETT projects involving university and enterprise partners from peripheral regions of the Community. This will contribute to more balanced Community development and thereby to the strengthening of its internal cohesion.

It is a broadening also in two senses: First of all, by opening up Strand B of COMETT II to highly qualified workers undergoing training, who will benefit from Community support to go to a university in another Member State to follow training defined jointly with the sending enterprise in terms of its training policy, and in agreement with the social partners concerned and the receiving university. This proposal, supported by the social partners, is based on the assumption that training as a whole and European mobility should not be limited to students only, particularly given the importance of continuing training for the modernization and development of enterprises. This broadening represents a contribution to the development of the social dialogue at Community level.

Secondly, the Community intends to adopt the possibility of opening up COMETT II to cooperation with university and industrial partners from European non-Member States as well as with international organisations. This possible enlargement, in the same spirit as that adopted for the Europe of technology, is such as to enrich the impact of COMETT actions.

Student Placements in COMETT II

The provision for student placements within COMETT II is already the subject of detailed discussion. That discussion includes consideration of the following points:

What are the types of student placements which should receive priority attention? Short awareness-building placements. Integrated placements of the type associated particularly with ERASMUS programmes? Longer placements (up to 2 years) as part of a larger integrated industrial training programme? Indeed, if the types of placements to be supported are exclusively of the type which ERASMUS could support within its objectives, should the support for student placements be organised more directly within the framework of ERASMUS?

How can the Community assist in developing student placements in industry in Member States where there is as yet no tradition or provision for such placement as part of higher education courses?

What can be done to improve the supply of student placements at a time when industry is under severe pressure at all levels of training to provide student placement opportunities? Indeed, what is the cost-benefit ratio of student placements for the parties concerned?

These are all challenging questions which will be addressed during the discussions of COMETT II.

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