

VALUE Network – Employability Sub-group

Meeting in Leuven, BE 25 March 2009

Present: Alison Hughes (University Liverpool, UK) Cristina Rigman (Babeş-Bolyai University, RO), Ruud Duvekot (InHolland University, NL), Matthew Hill (IVR, UK)

Overview of the preparation work for the meeting - charting ideas and possibilities arising from this

Discussion included:

- Need to focus on the *individual* and not the organisation.
- The subgroup theme covers:
 - Volunteers
 - Employed managers of volunteers
 - In some cases volunteers are helping give employment opportunities to third parties e.g. refugees, offenders in prison, those who are illiterate. TR partner Ilkyar working with literacy for women in TR.
- Terms – some broadly agreed definitions are important as ‘employment’ and ‘employability’ have slightly different meanings in different countries. For example - Employability can mean keeping your job and not just relate to someone who is currently out of work. Volunteering can enhance the employability of an individual in both circumstances. See notes below re glossary.
- Individuals’ motivations for volunteering may not be employment-related e.g. may be someone is unable to work (through long-term ill health; migrants; refugees), but even if this is the case what they gain through volunteering is likely to affect their employability in a positive way – so it impacts on employability even if this isn’t their prime motivation.
- ULLL brings to the volunteer- employability discussion opportunities for part or full time study for:
 - Qualifications – i.e. full awards of varying lengths (UK has some that are 60 credits i.e. equivalent to half year full time study
 - Small short courses possibly without academic credit or small accredited modules
 - Shell modules that allow for work-based learning / project- based work
 - APL – competences, skills, learning

But will ULLL make LLL for volunteers too formalised? Do some see the issue as ‘let’s keep it informal’?
- Potential themes within the subgroup could be:
 - APL (bearing in mind that it is a method not an end in itself)
 - There could be some useful discussion about ‘who values LLL and volunteering’ – from different perspectives - trade unions, universities, employers, volunteers, the state. For example are TUs sceptical about

volunteers because they see them as taking away jobs from employed people?

Ruud suggested compiling a matrix that questions the kinds of value placed on volunteering and ULLL in partner countries and asks 'is volunteering rewardable'? It could also encompass some work he has done previously taking into consideration the social/civic contribution of volunteering alongside personal development / development of qualifications/ empowerment and employability.

- Employment is a negotiation between 'demand for and supply of competences and knowledge'. Volunteering supports those competences/learning and also brings in a social focus and is, therefore, of value to other labour market sectors. ULLL for volunteers offers learning/qualifications, therefore, that support both work in the vol sector but also employment in other sectors.
LLL not only lifelong but also life-wide – so volunteering can develop generic skills/knowledge of value in working life.
- In RO discussion about how to use volunteering for re-qualification of people who have lost their jobs and want to enter new fields of work
- Challenging the 'instrumental approach' – e.g. in RO there is certification from the state to the vol sector to provide certain services. Emphasis is on competences/skills being accredited and not much interest from the state in learning- deeper knowledge aspect. Volunteering needs to be accepted across EU as a rich learning and working environment and not just something nice to do.
Another example - When volunteering is 'required' by the state is this really volunteering? In UK for example after some time unemployment benefits can decrease if the individual does not undertake some kind of unpaid work (New Deal) or citizenship applications can be fast tracked (Immigration and Citizenship Bill). Imposing volunteering isn't really volunteering at all – how does this affect the quality of the experience?
In view of these 2 examples, it is important to review the political landscape. Much is said about the 'knowledge- based economy' but is the state actually valuing the learning or just 'the doing'?
- In RO people employed in the vol sector are generally young (20-25) and use the experience gained to move into better-paid and more complex work. Thus working in the vol sector gives them good experience to allow them to then cross over into the private sector.
- How do companies get their staff into volunteering? What is their motivation – to develop/increase generic skills? Volunteering England in UK trying to develop this more e.g. with Barclays Bank (an evaluation by IVR – Matt to email details to Alison for her focus - see below)
- Employability in volunteering - is age-related:
 - For younger people who want to develop skills to enhance their employment opportunities
 - For those in mid-career who want to make a change in their field of work

Setting the objectives and methodology for the subgroup work: Agreed action points until next partner meeting in 11.2009

- ***Glossary:***

All agreed to provide some examples of possible definitions for

- Project –level terms e.g. adult; youth; volunteer sector compared to voluntary sector; third sector
- Employability Subgroup definitions – e.g. employment; employability; APL-VPL

Cedefop was suggested as a potential source of relevant terminology. Ruud also has relevant definitions in the field of VPL. Alison also gave all a copy of the MOVE project (CEV co-ordinated) glossary.

Once we have collected a few terms/definitions, Alison will circulate them to the subgroup for some comment/agreement and then send them to the project Management Group for consideration. It was agreed that we may not come up with conclusive definitions agreeable to all in the two sectors, but possible suggestions for terms which can be used by this project

- ***Dissemination***

All agreed to make some contacts within our own countries specifically related to this subgroup theme.

Alison suggested some organisations within UK she would contact e.g. SEEC, BITC, other UK universities running vocational courses for volunteers or their managers.

Matt suggested he would contact the Association of Volunteer Managers (AVM) and also Volunteer Centres across UK which are involved in a project around the issue of employment and volunteering

Ruud will contact various relevant organisations in NL and sees some of his contacts in the vol sector as a useful informal support group for the project.

Cristina knows of some RO universities that run courses for people working in the vol sector and she will contact them.

- ***Relevant bibliography/websites***

Ruud supplied a book (Managing European Diversity in LLL), which has a very relevant chapter on Volunteering and VPL by Bénédicte Halba. He will supply an electronic copy.

Alison supplied copies of WALL website (Centre for Study of Education and Work, University of Toronto, Canada), which has some relevant articles.

IVR supplied a hard copy of an IVR Research Report 'Management matters: a national survey of volunteer management capacity). It is available on the IVR website.

We will all look out a few relevant resources to include on the subgroup webpage

If the resource is in your own language then a short abstract in English should be supplied (a few lines). If we consider it very important to have it translated into other languages we will suggest this to the Management Group later on in the project

- ***Case Studies:***

1 or 2 paragraphs illustrating good practice or issues/problems/questions

- ***Preparing for Jonkoping***
Identifying some questions/issues to raise in the discussion in the open session focused on our subgroup theme. Some of these have been identified today but we can review them and finalise them later on. Suggest we take a perspective from our own countries and then invite those present to give some perspective from their own country.

- ***Individual subgroup members' focus:***
 - Ruud – an overview of valuing LLL and volunteering within the context of employment, looking at the various stakeholders (e.g. trade unions, employers, volunteers, the state, universities). See notes on discussion above.
 - Cristina – looking at needs/ expectations of volunteers (with particular reference to employment issues) for learning opportunities in universities. Will circulate some questions to other RO universities
 - Matt –similar to Cristina looking at UK and specifically a literature review.
 - Alison – ULLL needs of employed managers of volunteers in UK