

TRAVORS2: Developing Skills Training and a European Disability Employment Practitioner Certificate (EPC) for Personal Employment Advisers

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Introduction

This news article describes progress being made in TRAVORS project work that aims to develop skills training courses and an accredited learning qualification for vocational rehabilitation practitioners in the European Union.

The original TRAVORS project - **TR**aining for **VO**ccational **R**ehabilitation **S**ervices - was set up in 2008 to transfer skills training design principles and vocational rehabilitation training content from the UK to private sector and educational institutions in Austria, Estonia, Greece and Spain, to enable them to design and trial innovative trainer training and personal adviser training courses. An overview of the design principles and the TRAVORS projects has been provided by Booth (2009) and O'Malley (2010) in previous editions of this journal.

A technical evaluation of the skills training design principles was conducted, (Booth, Birkin & O'Malley, 2010) and TRAVORS2 builds on the success of the initial project by:

- developing TRAVORS training courses for personal advisers in a further five European partner countries (Objective 1);
- creating a work-based certification for practitioners in vocational rehabilitation to help formalise vocational learning in

disability employment practice (Objective 2); and

- developing a European network to promote the sharing of ideas and resources across TRAVORS partners and stakeholders interested in accrediting vocational rehabilitation practice in their own country (Objective 3).

The TRAVORS2 project runs from October 2010 to September 2012.

Leonardo TOI projects

TRAVORS1 and TRAVORS2 are examples of Transfer of Innovation (TOI) projects co-financed by the Leonardo Lifelong Learning Programme of the European Union.

For anyone not familiar with Leonardo TOI projects, the key aim is for European partnerships to work together to transfer and adapt innovative vocational education and training materials and methods.

Projects that receive funding tend to run for one or two years and are required to demonstrate the extent to which they have achieved six key Programme objectives:

- **Innovation** (products, processes and target groups need to be genuinely innovative);
- **Trans-nationality** (projects need membership from a number of European countries);

- **Partnership** (effective management and administration of partnership working is required);
- **Validity** (the project needs to meet the goals described in the project application);
- **Dissemination** (the project aims and outputs should reach a wide audience level); and
- **Valorisation** (the project outputs and outcomes need to achieve multiplier effects through mainstreaming activity).

The T2 partnership

TRAVORS2 comprises six partner organisations.

Rehabilitation Network Limited (RNL) has been the coordinator for both T1 and T2 projects and has shared course materials from one of its validated UK training courses with partnership colleagues. Occupational Psychologists from the **UK Department for Work and Pensions (DWP)** have also been involved in both projects, with its main role being to transfer a set of evidence-based learning design principles (Booth, Birkin, O'Malley and Mitchell-Lowe, 2011) to partners and to provide coaching and mentoring support in the design of their training courses.

Four partners are new to TRAVORS project work. **Merosystem** (Czech Republic) and **Vsi EDUKACINIAI PROJEKTAI** (Lithuania) represent private sector and not-for-profit training organisations respectively. **URI-Soča**, the Slovenian partner, is a rehabilitation unit within a university teaching hospital, while the Turkish partner is part of a special education faculty at **Selcuk University**.

The sixth partner, **Stan Lester Developments**, is from the UK. Stan's expertise in work-based qualification and accreditation systems is helping

the partnership achieve objective two of the T2 project.

T2 Project Objectives

Developing T2 training courses (Objective 1)

Five partner organisations agreed to design and deliver a TRAVORS2 training course for a target group of personal advisers in their own country. A two-day training event was organised at the start of the project to begin the transfer of the DWP training design principles, which constitutes one element of the UK's transfer of innovation to its European partners, and which emphasise the concepts of self-efficacy and skills acquisition, and the conducting of a rigorous learning needs analysis (LNA). DWP and RNL then provided ongoing coaching and mentoring support to the partners as they identified their target adviser groups and conducted their LNAs (Birkin, Booth, O'Malley and Mitchell-Lowe, 2011).

Not surprisingly, the LNAs revealed how vocational and employment rehabilitation advice is provided quite differently across the five partner countries.

In the UK, the target advisers are claims assessors for a major re-insurance company. The Czech Republic and Lithuanian partners are training employees from a number of non-government organisations (NGOs), while the Slovenians are training professionals within their own national rehabilitation research institute. Lastly, the Turkish partner has focussed on employment advisers for disabled people who work in state employment offices.

Following completion of the LNAs, the next step was to map the various learning needs onto the extant RNL course content, which constituted the

second element of the UK's transfer of innovation. Where there was a good fit between the two, the partners were invited to incorporate the materials and delivery methods into their own training course design. This might involve little more than a translation into the partners' language, although partners would also expect to produce their own content to achieve learning objectives for which no suitable RNL materials existed.

In November 2011, a training workshop was arranged in the UK for training course designers to consolidate their understanding of how the DWP principles and RNL training content should be utilised in the design of their learning events. In addition, the DWP training design document provided designers with a self-assessment checklist to review their course designs at each stage in the design lifecycle.

At the time of writing (March 2012), most partners have completed their training design and are now delivering courses to their target adviser groups.

Accrediting T2 training (Objective 2)

Certification

The third aspect of UK innovation transfer as been provided by Stan Lester and RNL, who have worked closely together to create a learning framework, covering six key aspects of disability employment practice, based on the RNL training course.

Collectively, they make up the six units of a new European Disability Employment Practitioner Certificate (EPC).

The EPC units are:

- Unit 1 - Professional skills and ethics
- Unit 2 - Engaging with client communities

- Unit 3 - Enabling clients to obtain work
- Unit 4 - Supporting clients in work
- Unit 5 - Supporting employers to employ disabled people
- Unit 6 - Case management

The EPC document (currently a project draft) specifies each unit in terms of its key learning outcomes and associated assessment criteria.

The T2 partners were assisted to identify units of the EPC relevant to the learning needs of their advisers, and around which the bespoke training has been designed. Five of the six EPC units will be covered in one or more of the T2 training trials; the only exception is unit 2: engaging with client communities (see below).

- Partner 1: units 1, 3 + 6
- Partner 2: units 1, 3 + 4
- Partner 3: units 1, 3 + 5
- Partner 4: units 1, 3 + 5
- Partner 5: units 1 + 3

Please note: Unit 1 is mandatory for any advisers wishing to achieve EPC certification.

Assessment

In keeping with most accreditation systems, there are two routes to certification.

First, individuals will choose one or more units they consider relevant to their practitioner role from the above list and a certificate will be awarded following a period of training and work-based assessment.

Second, practitioners with relevant prior experience may elect to be assessed on their workplace performance without undertaking the training.

EPC units will be assessed generally through either observation or examination of examples of work. In

the T2 project, the partners have been given advice on assessment methods and techniques with which to carry out these assessments themselves. The partners' experience of carrying out the assessments forms part of T2's internal evaluation of the effectiveness of the training and assessment procedures. In the future, the respective validating organisations would be likely to train their own assessors

Validation

Good progress is being made in exploring and progressing validation options in each partner country. RNL plans to use one of the UK national vocational awarding bodies to award its certificates. The Czech Republic and Lithuanian partners will be authorised to award certificates by national ministries: the Ministry of Education, Youth & Sport and the Ministry of Social Security and Labour respectively. The Slovenian partner plans to issue certificates under its own title, which may carry university credits. Similarly, Turkey is using its own university system to validate the training and certificate.

At the moment, the TRAVORS 2 Steering Group will be considered the European body to manage the EPC (the 'EPC Agency'). A new and more permanent arrangement will have to be implemented at the end of the project.

Networking (Objective 3)

The third main T2 objective is to promote the training and the certificate through a range of dissemination, valorisation and networking activities. To this end, each partner has drawn up a list of dissemination activities for its own national audience, and an end of project conference is being arranged (in Turkey, in September) to reach a wider audience of policy

makers and practitioner organisations across the European union.

TRAVORS 2 has a public website to share information about the T2 project and you are encouraged to visit www.travors-2.eu if you would like to know more about the project and the partners.

Regrettably, an organisational restructuring of the UK civil service has required the DWP partners to formally withdraw from the project, with effective from end-March 2012. The DWP team remains committed to supporting the transfer of innovation in training for vocational rehabilitation personal advisers, and in particular the leading edge skills development training design. Consequently, Richard Birkin aims to provide a contact point, over the next few months, with the project managers and anyone interested in finding out more about the underpinning skills training principles, see the project website for details.

What next?

An internal evaluation of the T2 training products and workplace assessment process is currently underway, along with further work to finalise EPC validation in each of the partner countries.

Additionally, the second phase of an external project evaluation is being arranged, with the findings used to assess the success of the project in relation to the six Leonardo TOI Programme objectives introduced at the start of this news item.

The final project evaluation will be made public early in 2013.

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