

Ex-post Evaluation of the TEMPUS III Programme

Executive Summary

Introduction

This report presents the findings of the ex-post evaluation of the TEMPUS III Programme 2000-2006 aimed at improving the quality of and support to higher education reforms in eligible Partner Countries, as well as the promotion of multilateral cooperation between Higher Education Institutions in the EU and in these partner countries. The evaluation focuses on five issues:

Relevance: The appropriateness of the programme project objectives to the problems that it was supposed to address, and to the physical and policy environment within which it operated.

Effectiveness: an assessment of the contribution made by the results to the achievement of the Programme, and how the assumptions made have affected programme/project achievements.

Efficiency: the extent to which results have been achieved at reasonable cost.

Impact: the effect of the programme/project on its wider environment, and its contribution to the wider policy or sector objectives.

Sustainability: an assessment of the likelihood of benefits produced by the programme to continue to flow after external funding has ended.

Political context

As was mutually agreed at the Lisbon Summit in 2000 the European Union is to become the most competitive and dynamic knowledge-based economy in the world, capable of sustainable economic growth with more and better jobs and greater social cohesion. Modernisation of Europe's universities, involving their interlinked roles of education, research and innovation, has been acknowledged by the Commission not only as a core condition for the success of the broader Lisbon Strategy, but as part of the wider move towards an increasingly global and knowledge-based economy.¹ To this end the European Commission published a modernisation agenda for universities which was welcomed by the Member States and the main stakeholders in higher education. The modernisation agenda for universities is part of the Lisbon Strategy for Growth and Jobs. In this process

¹ COM(2006) 208 final. Delivering on the Modernisation Agenda for Universities: Education, Research and Innovation.

the Commission is not a direct actor in the modernisation of universities, but it aims to play a catalytic role, providing political impetus and targeted funding in support of reform and modernisation. The important role universities play in enhancing European competitiveness is being supported by the work that is done in the context of the Bologna process aiming, by 2010, at comparable qualifications (short cycle, Bachelor, Master, Doctorate); flexible, modernised curricula at all levels which correspond to the needs of the labour market; and trustworthy quality assurance systems.

The launch of the Bologna process in 1999 strengthened the relevance of TEMPUS III in various ways:

- TEMPUS offered the partner countries and the participating institutions opportunities to engage in international cooperation and academic exchange and by this contribute to and become part of the European Higher Education Area (EHEA) which is aimed for by the Bologna process.
- TEMPUS offered the participating institutions opportunities to work on HE reforms that are prominent in the Bologna process, such as comparable and compatible degrees organised in a three-cycle structure (e.g. bachelor-master-doctorate), quality assurance and recognition of foreign degrees.
- Depending on the actual content of projects and the characteristics of HE systems TEMPUS also contributed to a broader societal relevance of higher education, for instance by establishing or improving the links between higher education, enterprises, research and innovation. It is emphasized, however, that this process is on-going and in some countries has only just started.

Also in other respects TEMPUS is not an isolated EU cooperation programme, but it has in various ways a clear role in other EU policies, although on some points there is room for improvement. In particular the complementary role between TEMPUS and Erasmus Mundus should be given more attention, in particularly since the Individual Mobility Grants (IMGs) were removed from TEMPUS. Furthermore, it is clear from the objectives of the Instrument for Pre-accession Assistance (IPA) and the European Neighbourhood and Partnership Instrument (ENPI) that TEMPUS can play a distinct role, for instance regarding strengthening (HE) institutions, reconciliation in the sense of promoting understanding between and reapproachment of cultures and human resources development, although its specific role appears to be underexposed.

Aside from its role to the EU External policy programmes, TEMPUS can also be claimed to have a function to the Sixth Framework Programme for promoting European research and technological development. For the relation between these two programmes we conclude that if academic education and academic research are to benefit to the full of each other – which in general is a sine qua non among academics - it appears that the complementarity or expected synergy between education reform programmes, like TEMPUS, and the European framework programme for research and technological development should get more attention than it has received up till now.

TEMPUS III programme

The TEMPUS programme is designed to help the process of social and economic reform and development in its Partner Countries. By means of cooperation between higher education institutions, TEMPUS also aims to strengthen civil society and promote democracy as well as enhance mutual understanding and intercultural dialogue between the EU and its partners. Funding for the programme is drawn from the financial instruments for external cooperation for the regions involved (IPA and ENPI previously mentioned, and as well the Development Cooperation Instrument, DCI).

The Commission launched the TEMPUS programme in 1990 with the aim of promoting higher education system reforms in the countries eligible for Commission support under the PHARE programme. During the second phase of the Trans-European Cooperation Scheme for Higher Education, Tempus II, which was adopted by the European Council in 1994, the number of eligible countries increased and funding was made available for PHARE² and TACIS³. TEMPUS III started in 2000 for Partner Countries in the TACIS and CARDS⁴ regions. In 2002 TEMPUS III broadened the scope to also cover the MEDA⁵ region. This decision was seen as a part of the wider strategy to strengthen dialogue between peoples and cultures in the European Union and the Mediterranean.

TEMPUS is a multilateral programme, in the sense that cooperation projects are undertaken by partnerships which include higher education institutions and non-academic partners such as companies and civil society organisations from Partner Countries and Member States. Through the TEMPUS programme, the European Commission wishes to support the Bologna Process, which aims to create a common European higher education area based on international cooperation and academic exchange that is attractive to students and staff in Europe as well as from other parts of the world, by 2010.

The TEMPUS III programme was implemented through the provision of grants for three types of projects:

- **Joint European Projects (JEP)** aimed to increase cooperation and network-building between actors in higher education in EU Member States and partner countries and help the higher education sector propagate its knowledge outside academic institutions. JEPS focused at curriculum development, university management and training courses for institution building.
- **Structural and Complementary Measures (SCM)** were designed to feed into national higher education policies. SCM were short-term activities aimed to enhance the capacity for strategic planning and institutional development of national bodies, to support the development or the implementation of a national strategy, action plan or legislation and to support the dissemination and use of the results

² Poland and Hungary: Assistance for Restructuring their Economies (Commission programme in the context of the Europe Agreements with 10 acceding and candidate countries in Central Europe)

³ Technical Assistance to the Commonwealth of Independent States (Commission programme in the context of the partnership and co-operation agreements with countries in Eastern European and the Asian states)

⁴ Community Assistance for Reconstruction, Development and Stabilisation (Commission programme in the context of the stabilisation and association agreements with countries in the Western Balkans)

⁵ Mediterranean Development Assistance (Commission programme in the context of the Euro-Mediterranean partnership)

- **Individual Mobility Grants** aimed to provide academic and administrative staff of the Higher Education sector with the opportunity to benefit from limited mobility periods abroad.

Two types of priorities for projects are given by the programme:

- *Common Policy Orientations* for Partner Countries, which refer to the broader policy background for cooperation in the different regions.
- The country specific *National priorities*, which were established on an annual basis by the EC in agreement with the National Authorities in the Partner Countries, and refer to higher education policy strategies in the countries.

Purpose and scope of the evaluation

The overall aim of the evaluation is to gain more insight in the relevance, efficiency effectiveness, impact and sustainability of the programme. The objectives of the evaluation are:

- Assessment of the programme according to the evaluation questions related to these evaluation criteria established in the Terms of Reference.
- The provision of concrete recommendations on how the current Tempus IV programme could be managed to better address any deficiencies and gaps identified, and to maximise its relevance and impact as well as successfully exploit examples of good practice.

As a follow-up to the 2004 Mid-Term Evaluation of the programme, the evaluation covered all actions and geographic areas of the programme, with a specific focus on activities since 2003 that were not covered by the interim evaluation. This ex-post evaluation seeks mainly to assess the impact of the Tempus III programme and provides recommendations for the current and future development of the programme, including monitoring and evaluation tools.

Methodology

In 2009 DG EAC launched the ex-post evaluation of the TEMPUS III programme. ECORYS was contracted to carry out the evaluation and the ex-post evaluation of the TEMPUS programme took place between February and October 2009. The evaluation was guided by an Evaluation Steering Committee consisting of Commission's officials.

In order to carry out an objective and thorough evaluation an evaluation methodology based on a 'multi-perspective' approach and the combination of quantitative and various qualitative research methods - enabling validation of findings – was designed. The evaluation process we undertook consisted of the following activities:

- Desk research of relevant documentation and reports;
- (Telephone) Interviews;
- Three web-based surveys by questionnaires with participants in the three project types;

- Five country studies to Macedonia, Morocco, Russian Federation, Serbia and Uzbekistan: desk research, case study of selected projects, interviews with participating students, National Authorities, Civil Society organisations, EC Delegation participants and beneficiaries.

In the implementation of these activities the evaluation team encountered some problems for which solutions were sought and found.

- Contact details of the participating students were not available. We overcame this drawback by interviewing (groups of) students, as far as they were available during the country visits.
- Due to a lack of contact details the questionnaire yielded a limited response from participants from Partner Countries. Despite this the evaluation gathered extensive information and experiences of participants in the five country visits.
- There is a risk that the project participants surveyed might have had an interest in presenting a biased picture of their achievements. We sought to independently verify the information collected through the numerous interviews (as well as document analysis) and the in-depth analysis of projects within the Country Case Studies.

Main findings

The findings of the evaluation relate to: efficiency, effectiveness, impact and sustainability. Here we present the main findings for each of these thematic issues.

Efficiency

The complex structure of the TEMPUS programme does not easily allow a quantitative measurement of cost-effectiveness. Its objectives are multi-faceted and refer to a large extent to systemic change of an indirect nature that quite substantially relies on external factors. This makes the attribution of effects to the Programme a considerable challenge. The heterogeneous programme outputs - partly due to the system of national priorities - make it difficult and probably even futile to establish unit costs that would otherwise provide a basis for comparison and an essential input for a quantitative assessment of cost-effectiveness. However, the qualitative evidence gathered through interviews and surveys clearly indicates that the Programme overall has made an important contribution to the development of the HE systems in the participating countries, which while compared to the available budget indicates a high level of cost-effectiveness.

In general the funding levels for TEMPUS III were not considered to be proportional to its ambitious objectives. Considering the large economic and social challenges in the eligible countries, the fact that the total budget for TEMPUS III was spent and that funding levels were insufficient to fund all relevant and high quality proposals, it can be asserted that the programme was under-funded. However, the absorption capacity of countries and institutions need to be considered. The funding levels for the selected projects appear in general to be sufficient.

TEMPUS was perceived as a cost-effective programme compared to (technical assistance) cooperation programmes. The multilateral nature of TEMPUS makes the policy instrument in essence cost-effective, although the degree differs per instrument.

JEPs are perceived as very cost-effective whilst the efficiency of both SCM (limited effectiveness) and IMG (high costs) mechanisms was viewed less positively.

Respondents were generally satisfied with the rigour of the selection process. The main issue identified concerns the perceived strong technical focus in the selection process. The weight given to the national needs and priorities on the 'ground' was considered by many respondents to be insufficient.

The monitoring process has improved considerably since the mid-term evaluation and this is clear from the positive feedback of project partners and beneficiaries. The main weakness that still remains concerned the limited feedback on field monitoring which could affect the effectiveness and quality of the projects and partnerships and the benefits of the overall monitoring on the implementation of the project.

Effectiveness

TEMPUS III has made an important overall contribution to the development of higher education systems, including to the five specific objectives of the 'Bologna Process'. This achievement includes 'core' higher education goals such as curriculum development, reform of higher education structures and establishments as well as development of skills profiles – although more so at the level of individual institutions than at the national policy level. Broader societal achievements are either harder to identify or appear to have been more indirect - TEMPUS III's bottom-up nature and the high level of people-to-people contact has definitely helped to promote understanding between and rapprochement of cultures but the contribution to the development of 'free and flourishing civil societies' is far less clear, with a lack of a clear vision on NGOs' role within the Programme.

Teachers benefited significantly from their involvement in TEMPUS III, notably through contacts with foreign colleagues, greater awareness of other cultures and EU institutions, improved training and the morale-boosting impact of career development and mobility opportunities. Students also benefited – through access to new learning materials/ methods, improved qualifications and greater awareness of other cultures – though less so in terms of the enhancement of their employability, where effects were more indirect.

Participation was geographically balanced in terms of both the EU and Partner Countries. EU HEIs viewed increased internationalization as the biggest benefit from involvement in TEMPUS III, with financial considerations rarely the sole reason for EU HE institutions to take part (in fact TEMPUS III is increasingly financially *unattractive* for certain Northern European universities, particularly in the UK). Participation was still relatively concentrated - with certain HEIs involved in multiple projects - and the highest-ranked EU universities were generally not participating. Geographical coverage within Partner Countries was balanced, with most public HEIs involved (either as a project partner or in dissemination activities), but private universities were prevented from participating in certain countries (e.g. FYROM). Non-university bodies (e.g. Ministries or accreditation/training bodies) were generally involved although the level of involvement was not always as widespread or as prominent as expected.

The size, scope and unique nature of TEMPUS III means that an identifiable, quality TEMPUS brand emerged in Partner Countries – particularly among university administrators, participating faculty staff and national HE actors, but less so among students and other faculty staff. In EU Member States the TEMPUS ‘brand’ is less pre-eminent, often in competition with bilateral HE support programmes.

Despite the overall positive picture, several weaknesses were identified. In particular, TEMPUS III struggled to promote systemic policy-level changes, with such change typically at best indirect and ad hoc. The inaccessibility of senior policy-level actors, varying levels of importance attached to HE and a lack of understanding of what SCMs are meant to achieve (along with them having a too short duration) all played a role here. The picture was not entirely negative however with some examples of important policy-level results achieved and it appearing that TEMPUS III had a greater impact at the policy-level in those countries seeking EU membership (Croatia, FYROM and Serbia).

Impacts

TEMPUS III helped to create more internationally oriented and flexible higher education institutions in the Partner Countries of the TEMPUS Programme. These are important impacts both in their own right and as a platform on which individual HEIs can further professionalise in the future. These, together with (related) impacts at the level of individual staff, are probably the single biggest impact of the programme. TEMPUS also made an important contribution to the long-term convergence process between Partner Countries (particularly the two Candidate Countries - Croatia and FYROM) and the European Higher Education Area (EHEA) that is under development through the Bologna process. Finally, TEMPUS III had a significant impact on establishing or rekindling regional co-operation among Partner Countries across all regions and made an important, yet often overlooked, impact in terms of strengthening co-operation within individual Partner Countries.

Notwithstanding significant variation at the regional, country and even individual HEI levels, TEMPUS III made an important contribution to making teaching more responsive to labour market needs (both the public and private sectors). Many new curricula have been developed – often responding to highly specific and previously unmet labour market needs. However, the time-lag before a ‘critical mass’ of graduates can start to have a national-level impact means that, in many cases, insufficient time has passed at this point for students trained through TEMPUS III projects to deliver clear impacts.

Impact in terms of decision-makers utilising skills developed through TEMPUS III to influence their respective institutions is positive at the HEI level but more moderate at the national (policy) level. Numerous decision-makers within HEIs took part in projects and many of these will be able to play a future role in reforms of their own HEIs. At the national level, TEMPUS III was not able to engage as actively with policy-makers, which, as a group, also often experience high staff turnover. More widely, TEMPUS III found it difficult to directly influence national legislation in a systematic fashion. Where changes were brought about, these appear to have been much more indirect in nature (e.g. TEMPUS III projects ‘feeding’ policy discussions through a ‘demonstration effect’). And although TEMPUS III was able to generate significant results at the level of individual institutions in domains such as quality assurance or general university governance, HEIs

often found it difficult to promote/disseminate these changes to lead to impacts at the national level. The impact of TEMPUS III on broader societal needs is also more limited. Whilst an important contribution was made through exposing citizens to European values, it did not make a significant contribution to strengthening civil society.

Sustainability

The evaluation indicates that in general JEP projects, particularly in the area of curriculum development can be seen as sustainable. Sustainable outcomes in the field of structural reforms were more difficult to establish, although there are examples of SCM projects which claim to have sustainable outcomes.

For many benefits/outcomes of the Programme it can be assumed that these do have a certain sustainability due the fact that the experience or the knowledge gained in the project cannot be wiped out after the project has ended.

- Regarding the IMG activities this “imminent” sustainability is true for various benefits at the *individual level*: increased knowledge of a study area, improved working practice, improved teaching and management skills, greater awareness of other cultures and EU institutions.
- At the *level of the organisation*, sustainable outcomes were reported, in the sense of new curricula, together with a more innovative culture in the institutions.
- Also regarding JEPs some of the produced outputs basically bear an element of sustainability, mainly due to the fact that most activities in the JEPs were related to curriculum development, and which to a large degree appeared to be still in use after the end of the project.

Within the TEMPUS programme the SCMs have the most structural reform elements, with ‘support to the development or implementation of a national strategy’ and ‘support to dissemination and use of the results of cooperation actions’ as focal issues. This support was mainly provided by way of staff training on good practices, seminars or conferences, and developing websites and information materials. Contrary to the JEPs and IMGs these outputs are ‘less tangible’, in particular in the short run. From the fact that a large majority of respondents (77%) indicated that the outputs were still in use by their own organisation or their partner’s, it can be concluded that the produced outputs are assessed as valuable, although this does not automatically imply that structural reforms have been initiated.

The evaluation also shows that in many cases the programme encouraged sustainable partnerships in higher education, involving EC and partner countries in various degrees depending on the character of the project. A vast majority of projects partners that responded to the survey indicated that the cooperation with at least some of the project partners was continued after the end of the project.

Another important issue for sustainability concerns funding. The findings indicate that an important contribution for this is made by the involved institutions: half of the JEP partners continued the TEMPUS related activities by way of own funding. Also other external sources were used for the continuation of activities, i.e. national budgets, other multilateral or bilateral funding sources and also external fund raising. In this respect it can be concluded that there appears to be a high level of financial commitment by various

involved stakeholders to continue the activities and networks that have been put in place by TEMPUS. It would be interesting to collect and disseminate the good practices on this, because lack of funding always is a critical factor in the continuation of activities of this kind of cooperation programmes.

Dissemination

The picture regarding dissemination of TEMPUS results is mixed. Depending on the scope of the various TEMPUS instruments, dissemination has a different character.

- At the level of IMGs and JEPs dissemination to a large degree mainly consisted of sharing knowledge and experiences to colleagues. Although this was often done intensively, it is not clear in the light of sustainability what significance can be attached to this kind of activities.
- Based on the country visits, it appears that in many cases the dissemination activities need further improvement. Aside from practical obstacles regarding dissemination, there seem to be more basic problems which are often overlooked in the process of dissemination. Although from a policy point of view there often is a clear need for dissemination of results, eventually promoting the achievement of objectives and with this creating value for money, the stakeholders involved do not always have the incentives to cooperate actively in dissemination.

Recommendations

In the final chapter of the main document of this evaluation several recommendations are presented in an elaborated way, including the justification. In this summary we present a shortened version of these recommendations.

Recommendation 1 – Strengthen strategic programme orientation.

We recommend to strengthen the strategic orientation of TEMPUS, by making the strategic links between TEMPUS projects - national TEMPUS priorities and the national HE reform agendas (more) explicit. This would allow for proper strategic choices about the role TEMPUS can play in national HE reforms, including a targeted and well-founded use of SCMs. For this, it is recommended

- to **strengthen the policy dialogue** at national level as well as the dialogue between the EC and the national stakeholders, against the background of a clear – agenda-setting – national policy framework in the field of higher education.
- to **identify and disseminate good practices** of countries that already are working along the recommended lines.

Recommendation 2 – Improve effective synergy with Erasmus Mundus and other Community actions

In order to improve coherence of policy instruments and with this an effective use of instruments by stakeholders at all levels we recommend the EC to strengthen the links with the wider national policies in the countries as far as education system reforms are concerned (see also recommendation 10), improving communication on Erasmus Mundus and other Community initiatives and encouraging links with research.

Recommendation 3 –Reconsider level of funding in view of TEMPUS objectives

It is recommended to the EC to reconsider the levels of funding for TEMPUS with respect to the ambitious goals it has set. To reach a critical mass of projects that can be expected to have a concrete and sustainable impact at HE institutions and national policies based on the goals set higher levels of funding are recommended, without disregarding the absorption capacity of the applicants involved. Contrary to the current practice in TEMPUS IV, it is recommended to allow for smaller projects in line with the differentiated demand in the Partner Countries.

Recommendation 4 – Enrich quality of project proposals

It is recommended to further strengthen the quality of project proposals. Specifically we recommend:

- to both EC and NTO to give more support (advice and training) to potential participants to prepare a technical sound proposal;
- to the EC to require applicants to refer to current or previous relevant projects in the country, including lessons learned and the way this new application would complement/build-upon what went before;
- to the EC to give a clear explanation on the (final) selection and the applied criteria in this to the national stakeholders involved in the selection process.

Recommendation 5 - Improve the effectiveness of field monitoring

We recommend to improve elements of the evaluation and monitoring procedures of TEMPUS, especially regarding the field monitoring. Specifically, we recommend:

- to the NTOs and EC to have structural debriefings at the end of the monitoring visit;
- to the EC to encourage the contract partners to send the feedback letter to all partners involved (in the monitoring visits) and to request a substantiated reaction on this by the consortium partners.

Recommendation 6 - Give greater support to National Contact Points (NCPs) in New Member States

We recommend the EC to provide support (e.g information and training) to and to investigate funding opportunities for NCPs in new Member States in order to assist them to promote TEMPUS in the eligible countries.

Recommendation 7 - Better define the involvement of the ECD to improve the (structural) dialogue with the national authorities on HE

We recommend the EC to better define and communicate on the level of involvement of the Delegation. This would provide a forum for a dialogue on and assessment of TEMPUS in the specific partner country, helping to achieve greater involvement and more empowerment of the national stakeholders.

Recommendation 8 – Continuation of TEMPUS-like projects after EU accession

We recommend the EC to improve communication on alternatives for continuation of TEMPUS –like projects after country has acceded the European Union. Logically this communication would involve the actions under the Erasmus Programme and Erasmus Mundus (see also recommendation 2).

Recommendation 9 – More emphasis on best practices – information on linkages with the labour market and civil society

We recommend that the EC and NTOs should pay more attention to the ways that TEMPUS projects can be linked to the labour market and civil society. Successful projects should be disseminated.

Recommendation 10 – Give more priority to management reform projects

We recommend the EC and NTO and other involved parties to give more priority to projects focused at reform of HEI management to achieve durable impacts in this area.

Recommendation 11 – Give more attention to accessibility (equal opportunities) of the projects.

We recommend the EC to give more attention to equal opportunities in the project, by

- requiring applicants to fill out a specific section on equal opportunities in the project proposal and monitoring report;
- discussing with the NTO the importance of equal opportunities;
- monitoring and reporting on the achievements in this area.

Recommendation 12 - Support additional ambitions of projects

We recommend the EC to consider giving support for additional ambitions of projects which strictly speaking are beyond the scope of the Programme. Therefore the EC should explore the range of this kind of additional ambitions, investigate the problems that these are confronted with and see how extra support could be given to solve the problems. Dissemination of good practices, e.g. regarding double diplomas and joint degrees, could be an effective and efficient approach for this.

Recommendation 13 – Improve both dissemination and use of project results

At the programme level we recommend the EC to actively promote dissemination of project outcomes and results. This should be done in close relation to the strategic programme orientation (see recommendation 2). Good practices can play a key role in this. Use should be made of previous insights and achievements on effective dissemination, within the TEMPUS programme as well as in other similar programmes.

Dissemination of evaluation results

Aside from the communication by the EC related to the legislative procedures surrounding the TEMPUS programme the evaluation team would like to suggest the following activities regarding the dissemination of the evaluation results:

- the EC to put the evaluation report, including its Annexes, on the website of the Commission;
- the EC to ask all NTOs to put the summary of the final report on their website with a link to the full report on the website of the Commission and inform relevant stakeholders;
- the EC to ask the NTOs that were involved in the country studies to place their country report on their website and inform relevant stakeholders;

- ECORYS to send a summary of the report to all respondents that were interviewed or participated in the online survey, with a link to the full report on the website of the Commission.