

***Online expert group meeting on Education & Training***

***Date and time: 13 April 13.00-15.30h CET***

***Education & Training during Covid-19 : experiences, recommendations, lessons learnt***

**REPORT**

CEP President Gerry McNally opened the meeting by welcoming everyone and by saying that this was a very important meeting as there was a lot of expertise in the group. He emphasized that it was of great importance that this group became a network, meaning working together outside the CEP meetings and keeping in touch for sharing and learning from each other. *“The members of this group need to make the group work”*, were his words.

CEP Secretary General Willem van der Brugge took over and said that in principle this meeting should have taken place in Barcelona but that unfortunately this was not possible because of the Covid-19 restrictions. He said that for this reason it was nice that Marc Cerón (from the Department of Justice in Catalonia) was the first speaker and could lead the group into the topic.

**Mr. Marc Cerón (Spain Catalonia)** started by saying that these were indeed very challenging times in the sense of training. His team had definitely not been ready for a crisis like Covid-19, especially because of the restrictions and impossibilities that came with it. On the other hand they had been forced to make themselves ready and somehow managed to do so. It was *“more trial & error than concrete planning”* he said, and there was a lack of IT knowledge within the staff, but in a very short time the shift was made to virtual learning instead of face-to-face trainings and activities could continue to be organized.

The next step was now to think about the future and the new normality – what would training look like after this crisis? What online aspects would remain and what would change? Surely the future would be different from the past, but on the other hand it would certainly not be the way things were now. Marc said that the actual period could be seen as a transition period, to learn from what was done, and to find a new balance. Online and face-to-face trainings could be combined, and in this way even more people could be reached, for example also those based outside of Barcelona.

After he finished his speech Mrs. Andrea Matouskova (**Czech Republic**) introduced the next speaker – her colleague **Mr. Martin Kracik**, a specialized trainer in (among others) victim-offender mediation. She said that in her organization basic training was given, as well as training for specialists and training on supervision & mentoring. Like Marc Cerón she indicated that in a very short time new ways for training the personnel had needed to be found.

Martin took over and thanked CEP for the opportunity to present. He described the challenges that they had been facing: the technical difficulties, the problem of getting easily distracted at home (for example with children) and the question how skills could be trained online?

He had attended several online meetings of other organizations and had been impressed by the possibilities that there were, like break-out sessions, quizzes, splitting in small groups etcetera. He realized that it was important to push participants out of their comfort zone and to keep the online trainings dynamic and interactive.

Then he asked himself the question what the situation would look like after Covid-19? Certainly it would not be the same as before the pandemic – it should be interesting to discuss this with the other group members. What should we keep after Covid in order to be(come) more efficient?

The third presentation was given by **Mrs. Cira Stefanelli (Italy)**, who also thanked CEP for the opportunity. She said to present a short reflection on how her organization managed to address the problems that Covid-19 brought for the training groups. For example – how to avoid distance learning to become a mere transmission of information?

The big challenge was the training course for the 323 newly recruited social workers. They were divided over 6 virtual classrooms and were trained via accompanying learning with moments dedicated to reflection and exchange, and moments of individual work at the office. The course focused on what was actually happening in the field, and included group work to stimulate discussion and (inter)active participation. How was all this realized online? The Probation Service had decided to redefine its community strategies in order to optimize the use of online settings. Many videos were used, as well as interactive interviews that forced the participants to act and react to various situations. There were many meetings with tutors, teachers and staff, and ad-hoc tools (outlines, schemes, questionnaires) were prepared to facilitate the learning. And last but not least it was of crucial importance to develop an online platform that allowed sharing of experiences as well as sharing and uploading documents, reports and other materials. The process of the training was continuously monitored and assessed.

Soon an official evaluation would be done including also the opinions of the students, but already during the process the teachers experienced a growing motivation to engage in the new function, as well as the wish to keep one's knowledge up to date via other trainings and/or self-training activities.

The fourth presenter was **Mr. David Williamson from Ireland**. He started by saying that Probation in Ireland was quite special as the country was very wide-spread so included a lot of rural staff. The core staff consisted of professionally qualified social workers, dealing with around 19.000 offenders each year.

Until March 2020 there had never been a culture of IT and online things – for example there were very few smartphones and tablets. The Covid-19 pandemic brought therefore a lot of challenges. The small unit of Learning & Development had to deliver all necessary changes and the entire roll-out of these IT aspects took over 9 months. Every staff member received a smartphone and all these were upgraded in order to have internet and email access. The existing training programs were redesigned into online versions and new manuals and online sources were written and set up. A so-called padlet was set up and different layers of communication tools were created, like an online probation toolbox and Loom.

David ended his presentation by identifying the lessons learnt from the pandemic and mentioned both the challenges (IT issues, the loss of face-to-face contacts and informal discussions during lunch) and the gains (better attendance level at trainings, new and efficient tools) and said that for the future a good combination of both needed to be found.

The last presentation was given by the **École Nationale d'Administration Pénitentiaire (ENAP) in France**, delivered by **Mr. Michel Flauder and Mr. Cédric Le Bossé**. They told the participants that in their country from 17th March until 11th May 2020 a mandatory lockdown had been in place.

It was a really difficult situation as at that very moment 998 trainees were on site for a training project, so the main objective was to set up a training continuity plan. The content of the training was transferred to a digital one and IT support was available for everyone. During this first lockdown only online training took place, later on also blended learning became available. It was a big challenge to solve the issue of the multi-week trainings that were scheduled and now had to be done online as face-to-face was not possible. Besides this also the trainers themselves needed to upgrade their capacities in order to deliver online trainings (training new skills during the delivering of the training).

Nevertheless several new and innovative projects were set up like ICC, ADERE and CHANGES (see powerpoint slides for more information) .

Michel and Cédric concluded their presentation by mentioning the lessons learnt and the challenges for the coming period: to have in-person training and distant training at the same time ; to speed up the digital platform development ; to train the trainers (for this new way of working) and to implement new professional practices.

Gerry McNally then took the floor and said that truly all presentations had been very interesting. “Two things struck me”, he said: the required innovations and new tools, and the question how to train remotely to supervise people remotely?

It would be very interesting to hear opinions about this, so he invited the participants to come up with suggestions and/or comments.

Cristina Neves (Portugal) said that her organization had done a big effort to transform the group training programs into online ones, including training the trainers to deliver such programs. She said that at the moment there was not a specific group of trainees yet so it was to be seen how things worked, but at least the effort had been taken to be prepared.

Willem asked if young probation officers coped differently (more easy) with the online situation compared to the older ones..? Cira answered that they had done their best to take care of everyone in the broadest sense according to the specific needs, and Michel indicated that the profile of trainees varied a lot – there were young people and old but this did not have a direct relation to their knowledge of online tools. The most difficult for the trainer was, he said, to communicate the content of the training via a digital atmosphere.

Cira recognized that in the current time there were new needs for social workers – how could they best deal with offenders via a video connection?

Marc said that it was of great importance to recognize the needs of the probationers. In one way they felt less alone as communication was done more often and more easily, but on the other hand a new problem arose through the fact that probation workers entered their “intimacy” by meeting with them in their own living room – it would be good to consider this aspect.

Debbie Knight (UK) indicated that in her country the feedback on the online trainings had been extremely positive regarding the online sessions. It were rather the trainers to find things difficult because how can you be sure that people are really there when they have turned their camera off and you can only see a black screen..?

Cédric indicated that they had been working on new training formats like a “serious game” on ethics and David said that all new skills that are being learnt should be modelled and practiced in order to make them optimal and most efficient.

Then professor **Ioan Durnescu (University of Bucharest, Romania)** was introduced by Willem for the next short presentations on the training programme on *Core Correctional Skills*.

Ioan started by saying that he found it extremely impressive and fascinating to see all the developments that had taken place during the pandemic time. He indicated that organizations could make a very good use of technology and that this could be really effective when using the right tools – in fact in this way people could be given back the control to own and follow their own process. He said that this was exactly what they had done for the PONT project (Probation Observatory Network and Training, <https://probationobservatory.eu/>) online course: there were no strict deadlines so as long as people met the requirements and were in time for completing their tasks, they could control their own process and next steps.

Danijela Mrhar Prelic indicated that in her organization there had been a discussion with the head of the unit about the effectiveness of online trainings and that in general the feedback had been very good. For some aspects however, like supervision training, the results were less positive and it was therefore not sure if in that area online trainings could give enough to the probation officers. She said that Slovenia had been in a lockdown for 6 months now, and both the probation officers as well as their clients missed the face-to-face contacts and started to lose motivation.

David Williamson told the group that in his country several new things were developed, a process in which they had also contacted other jurisdictions to learn from their experiences. He said that it had made them realize the big difference between clients who you can see remotely and those who really need the face-to-face contacts. It was very important to know when you will get more out of the use of technology, and when you get less. *“From every practice you can learn”*, he said.

Nadya Radkovska (Bulgaria) indicated that she was very much in agreement with what Danijela had said regarding human contact – according to her this was essential for the building of trust. Technology and IT were surely useful and worked very well for sharing information but how about learning skills? For those physical contacts were essential. She said that at the moment in Bulgaria there were no online trainings for probation staff – just seminars and brief working sessions.

Goran Brkic (Croatia) fully recognized this, especially since the pandemic had been already so long now. In his organization face-to-face education had started up again – of course with the use of masks, social distancing and only bringing together small groups. Like Nadya he emphasized the importance of “live” education.

Ioan Durnescu reacted by saying that it wasn't a matter of *“either-or”*. Technology and face-to-face could both be used, each for its own strength and possibilities. He informed the participants about the book and course on *“Core Correctional Skills”* – recently an online course specifically dedicated to the working alliance had been developed, using role plays and other interactive features. Several resources were used to develop the course and the positive thing regarding technology was that in this way materials could be easily translated and/or adapted to local regimes and systems.

He said that in November an International Training School on the topic was organized in Barcelona – a live event for a week during which the idea would be to enhance skills, work together and give each other feedback. The entire training would not only consist of the lessons and lectures itself, but also of information on the transfer from training class to the actual work situation (from theory to practice).

Then Willem took the floor again to update the group on the last agenda point – the project proposal that Joep Hanrath (Utrecht University of Applied Sciences, the Netherlands) had drafted on the Dialogue Trainer. He said that (as the EU prioritizes Education & Training) this might be a good opportunity, but that it would be important to search for partners and to refine the content. Would the members of the group be willing to do so and work together?

Gerry took over by saying that in order to reach more, this expert group would need to work as a network – in fact this might be the start of more projects! He said that the pandemic had clearly shown the urgency of this need and it was really relevant to work together and share as much as possible.

According to him the next steps would be to extend the group and to involve more jurisdictions in order to reach more experts and further develop knowledge. *“We need energy and new ideas”*, he said. It was extremely important, not only for CEP and its members but also for the European Commission, to develop the group during the coming years and to keep it growing. In that sense he said that it would be really good to meet more regularly, like 2 or 3 times a year instead of only 1.

Gerry then thanked the presenters and invited everyone to keep in touch and to learn from each other – not only the difficulties but also the options and opportunities. *“Let’s make this group the core driver of all these good ideas and opportunities”*, he concluded.