

UK•SKILLS

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International Vocational Training Organisation Technical Committee

Project selection and confidentiality

Introduction

At the St Gallen competition in 1997 there was widespread concern among experts at the process of project selection in some trades and also the failure to maintain the confidentiality of projects. This reflected badly on the fairness of the competition and the credibility of the IVTO. In one respect 1997 was unusual in that the commissioning of 'independent experts' to prepare projects was the only way to move to the new system of project selection for the **following** competition, in the case of those trades with insufficient projects in the 'bank'. It is also a fact that there was no criticism on these grounds in the case of trades with their special systems of project selection (4,5?, 9, 16, 17, 33 and 37). The existence now of a 'bank' of projects for Montreal and future years will not however automatically solve all the problems met in St Gallen. This paper attempts to summarise the main problems which remain in creating a fair and progressive system of project selection as well as discussing the related issue of confidentiality.

The advantages of selection in advance from a bank

1. Enables host country to organise provision of all materials in advance and no more than is necessary, thus reducing costs and time pressure.
2. Should shorten time that experts have to be in the host country before the competition and thus reduce costs.
3. Prevents experts selecting lowest common denominator (easiest) projects or those that particularly suit their particular competitor at that event.
4. Depending on **who** selects, **how** projects are selected and against what **criteria**, potentially enables the selector(s) to choose demanding, innovative projects which fully exploit the technical description.
5. Elements of different projects may be combined.
6. The projects can be prepared in the three official languages and drawings can be assured of being to an acceptable standard.
7. The possibility of practising banked projects, if they are not kept confidential, will diminish as the number of banked projects increases.

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Problems in selection from a bank

1. Experts, other than the author, may have been permitted to retain copies used during the discussion, so that such projects may have been capable of being practised thus disadvantaging the competitor who did not have an expert at the preceding competition.
2. As the experts choosing projects for the bank are not necessarily those who will assess the outcome two or more years later, they may not be as rigorous in the scrutiny of projects.
3. The existence of a bank and selection from it allows possible disclosure of projects either via those who select or those preparing the competition in the host country.
4. Technology in some industries changes within two years making banked projects out-dated.
5. Possible disclosure gives rise to the risk of competitors preparing and bringing special tools, jigs, fixtures and templates.

All these possibilities compromise a fair competition.

Confidentiality versus openness of projects

The foregoing considerations have given rise to the suggestion that it is not necessary, desirable or realistic to insist on confidentiality. At the extreme, advocates of openness have suggested publication of projects three months or more in advance on the Internet.

Arguments in favour of openness

1. It meets many of arguments both in favour of and against selection from a bank.
2. Even if he or she has practised the project the competitor still has to perform on the day.
3. Prior publication of the general outline of a project would not preclude certain modifications by the experts or the combination of different elements immediately before the competition.

Arguments against open projects

1. It disproportionately favours countries and competitors with the resources and time to practise, and is particularly hard on the self-employed.
2. It does not accord with commercial reality.

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3. It is inappropriate to any projects which consist of or include faultfinding since this deals with uncertainties.
4. It reduces the scope for innovation and problem solving.

The case for a trade by trade approach

IVTO experience is very often that arrangements appropriate to one trade are inappropriate to another and the organisation has de facto recognised this already in project selection for certain trades.

Existing special arrangements

In the case of trades 33 and 37 the models are known far in advance but each fault is confidential to two experts. In the case of trades 16 and 17 the cost of providing equipment has resulted in procedures which are acceptable to all concerned and produce very fair competitions. Similarly trade 4 had acceptable special arrangements in St Gallen. Trade 9 similarly has a special procedure.

It is suggested however that in the interests of transparency all the special procedures should be described in the technical descriptions as in the case of trade 33 and in the revised technical description for trade 16.

Engineering, construction and woodworking trades

These trades, including 1, 2, 3, 6, 7, 8, 11, 12, 14, 15, 20, 21, 22, 23, 24, 25 and 26, have hitherto been single task projects, which it is proposed in the future to select from the bank.

It would seem that the 'surprise element', the ability to interpret the drawing correctly, the ability for instance in the case of CNC to plan the work holding, the operation sequence, the tooling and planning and writing the programme, the ability in all these trades to visualise the end product and plan how to achieve it, are **essential parts of the competition** which would be entirely lost if competitors had weeks or months to do this. **Surprise is essential to the competitions in these trades.**

The problem is that the experts who attended the St Gallen competition are aware of all the projects in the bank and may even have copies of the drawings (or at least taken notes). This significantly assists the training of their competitors for Montreal and disadvantages any new country's competitor in those trades.

It is therefore suggested that

- in future those presenting a project should only bring **one** copy in each official language

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- experts should be forbidden from taking notes during the discussion and
- for Montreal 'independent experts' should select and **modify** the projects so that, whilst the **materials** can be specified, the **precise details** of the projects remain confidential until given to the experts to approve and agree the marking criteria.

The 'creative' trades

The creative trades, including 28, 29, 30, 34 and 35, generally appear to have a very similar series of tasks at each competition. The challenge to the competitors lies in dealing creatively with the ingredients supplied for cookery or the flowers and leaves provided for floristry. In hairdressing competitors have to deal with unpredictable live models or face restrictions in the tools or techniques to be used in particular tasks. Guidance on the different tasks to be performed is already given in the technical descriptions and it would seem perfectly possible to use the banked projects. Competitors practice all these techniques anyway and essentially competitors have to use the materials provided on the day. In these trades it could be said that prior knowledge of the precise tasks is no great advantage.

Assuring confidentiality

In those trades where it has been decided to maintain confidentiality there are two issues:

- to ensure that sufficient detail is given to the host country to enable appropriate material to be prepared
- to ensure confidentiality of the project and in particular to protect the host country and those involved in the selection and preparation process from any allegation of disclosure.

The first issue would not seem to be difficult to resolve since the materials can be specified without disclosing the details of the project. The second would seem to be best resolved by identifying experts who know the Skill Olympics but will not be directly involved in Montreal. Former chief experts would be the most suitable. Their names would be made public (perhaps?) and any payment to them would be conditional on there being no disclosure. The IVTO secretariat would have to create and observe tight security procedures.

Recommendation

It is recommended that the suggestions in this paper, aimed at improving the fairness and credibility of the competition, be carefully considered by Franz Schropp, Don Hatton and Daniel Sommer in consultation with the Canadians at their meeting in Montreal at the end of February 1998.

