



## **Tourist Guide Training: The Way Forward**

### **General Observations**

Tourist Guides are representatives of their cities, regions and countries. They significantly influence whether visitors feel welcome, want to stay longer or decide to come back. They therefore contribute considerably to the promotion of a destination.

Tourist Guides are able to give travellers an understanding of the culture of the region visited and the way of life of its inhabitants. They help to protect our cultural and natural heritage by making visitors aware of its importance and vulnerability.

Tourist Guides are often the only local contact for travellers, especially those from other countries. They can therefore contribute greatly to a mutual understanding amongst nations and cultures.

The European Federation of Tourist Guide Associations (FEG) supports the EU efforts to facilitate free movement of provision of services within its member states, emphasising the importance of area-specific tourist guides to high quality provision of tourism services. This can only be achieved by a common high standard of qualification for Tourist Guides in all European countries.

FEG, from its foundation aimed to create common training standards, stressing in its Directive Proposal of 1989 and a subsequent Proposal for a EU Recommendation on Minimum Standards in 1994 the importance of a combination of knowledge and guiding skills. A survey of existing tourist guide training and qualification was carried out and presented at the 1996 EGM in Crete. The diversity of systems in European countries shown by the survey made it clear that the development of a common training programme for the whole of Europe was not feasible.

In 2002/3 FEG asked tourist guides in member countries for their own views on what should be included in tourist guide training programmes in order to effectively train tourist guides to meet the needs of today's visitors. The results of the survey showed that colleagues' views on the main requirements for their profession correspond completely with one another – no matter where they guide and which training and assessment they have passed. This result has encouraged FEG to develop guidelines for tourist guide training. These guidelines give freedom to countries, regions and cities to decide the level, extent and main areas of their training programmes, but state the requirements for tourist guide training which will result in a quality tourist guide service in all member countries.

Tourist guide training must include area-specific core knowledge set against a common European background as well as the professional (practising) skills required for effective

presentation of that core knowledge. It is imperative to teach and assess this knowledge and these skills in the areas and sites where they will be used as they always have to be adapted to local conditions. The area of qualification is dependent on the situation in member countries.

The common qualification requirements set up below result in tourist guide qualification at educational level C, on the EU scale of educational qualifications.

## **Common Qualification Requirements**

### **A. CORE KNOWLEDGE**

**Tourist guides inform visitors on all the relevant aspects of life in their city, region or country. They therefore need a wide range of knowledge in many different fields. They have to constantly update their information and be aware of current events and emerging developments.**

#### **A.1 Core Knowledge Requirements**

The diversity and depth of knowledge to be provided depends on the profile of both the destination and the visitors

In towns or sites moulded by a particular event or period a more specific range of knowledge may be required than in a place with a very varied history and many diverse fields of importance. Tourist guides working mostly in the countryside need different types of knowledge from those working in towns and cities. Geographical differences will also affect the depth and range of knowledge required.

All tourist guides need in-depth knowledge. Whilst urban tourist guiding mostly requires greater emphasis on history, architecture, town planning, the arts, etc. rural/countryside guiding tends to require greater emphasis on geography/geology, flora/fauna, agriculture, folklore/country life etc.. In the European context, wherever tourist guides work, they must be able to establish relevant links to other parts of Europe.

In most areas tourist guides have to deal with great diversity of visitors, which include business people, conference delegates, shoppers and holidaymakers. Therefore they must not just have a wide range of knowledge, but must be flexible in their commentary according to the needs and interests of their visitors and be able to respond quickly to different situations.

Even specialist visitors are interested in the general aspects of the area they are visiting e.g. *the Renaissance fan may want to know how people live today in Ferrara, which plants grow along the streets and why there is a demonstration on the main square and the nature walk enthusiast will also want to know about ancient archaeological sites and churches along the way.*

In summary wherever tourist guides work, they need a comprehensive and detailed knowledge of the city, region or country for which they are qualified to guide. It is obvious that this knowledge cannot be extended without geographical limit and is area specific. As Core

Knowledge is area-specific, member countries must select and weight core knowledge in accordance with local requirements.

## **A.2 Area Specific Core Knowledge Modules**

The following generic modules, agreed at the FEG Training Seminar in Gran Canaria in November 2003 must be included

- Archaeology, Art History & History
- Geography, Geology and Landscape Interpretation
- Natural Heritage including Flora and Fauna
- Culture including Arts (Visual and Performing), Literature, Music, Customs and Traditions, Mythology
- Industry both urban and rural
- Modern Life including Law, Politics, Comparative Religion, Education, Health, Sport, Economy, Current Events
- General European background cultural knowledge
- Sustainable Tourism and the tourist guide's role

Although tourist guides must hold qualifications for clearly delineated cultural areas, common European modules established by FEG (along the lines of themed cultural itineraries) shall be made available as an option to further cultural trans-national exchanges.

The core knowledge can be acquired in accredited tourist guide courses, in university and college studies – using correspondence and web-based courses where appropriate - and through private study. The knowledge has to be assessed in detailed exams in the language of the host country, at least part of which must be written.

Before embarking upon a tourist guide qualification course it is essential that aspirants are personally interviewed to find out about their cultural background and knowledge, general education, open-mindedness, thirst for knowledge, ability to study and assimilate information and to assess their commitment to continuing professional development.

The core knowledge area specific modules will be set up and assessed by the accrediting bodies of the member country in which the tourist guide wishes to work. These accrediting bodies will define the form and level of examination required for the tourist guide to be qualified in their city, region or country.

## **B. PRACTISING SKILLS**

**Tourist Guides help visitors to experience, understand and enjoy the places they are visiting. Their role is to interpret the area specific environment and to help visitors to see what they are looking at. Therefore tourist guides need to be able to assess their audience, adjust to their respective interests and requirements and present the appropriate information in a clear and entertaining way.**

### **B.1 Communication Skills and Guiding Techniques – The Art of Guiding**

The identification and consideration of visitors' expectations and needs requires psychological insight, flexibility and appropriate selection from a wide range of knowledge. Specific communication skills are essential to enable tourist guides to present the knowledge

they have chosen for the particular audience in a dynamic and pleasing way. Tourist guiding techniques optimise the use of voice, gestures, positioning and group management.

These skills and techniques can only be taught in a practical way. They are not area-specific but nevertheless it is imperative to teach and assess them in the areas and sites where they will be applied, as they have to be adapted to local conditions.

Like actors, singers or teachers tourist guides must be trained in specially designed training programmes, which include practice of their skills. Theoretical studies, reading books, listening to or watching others will not alone achieve this. Trainee tourist guides must practice in the field – walking tours, site visits & coach tours as appropriate. These should include a wide range of representative sites e.g. historical buildings, archaeological sites, museums, galleries and religious buildings. There should also be town and country walks as well as tours in a moving vehicle as appropriate for the area.

A number of member countries have developed effective methods and standards for training and assessing communication skills and guiding techniques. Within a tourist guide course FEG considers that an interactive communication seminar is a necessary component. It helps greatly in both assessment and in understanding a candidate's progress. FEG members have developed such seminars and FEG can approve trainers who have delivered them. It is difficult to train these personal skills and therefore they must be assessed. Personality and experience of life are often more important in this field than academic titles.

Communication skills and guiding techniques must be assessed in in-depth practical exams. Exams shall include tourist guiding in relevant areas or sites e.g. walk (town and/or country), at a site (museum, gallery, religious building, archaeological site, historical site) and on a coach or other moving vehicle (with use of a microphone). The assessment cannot be simulated in a classroom, as tourist guides have to be able to adapt to real situations when tourist guiding.

## **B. 2 Practising Skills Modules**

The following practising skills modules must be included in tourist guide training courses as agreed at the FEG AGM in Riga in November 2004.

### **Presentation Techniques**

- Use of the voice including projection, microphone techniques, diction, vocabulary
- Eye contact, body language
- Positioning (of both tourist guide and group)

### **Control and Management Techniques**

- Group management in different tourist guiding contexts; on foot, in the coach, in museum/church/ stately home etc.
- Group dynamics

### **Communication Techniques**

- Audience assessment and cultural sensitivity / interpersonal skills
- Structure, selection and linking of information
- Handling and use of questions
- Description of Top Visual Priorities (TVP)

## **C. BUSINESS SKILLS**

**Tourist Guides in a number of countries work in a self-employed category. Whether self-employed or employed they need to know about marketing and running a tourist guide business and to understand relevant rules and regulations, including health and safety as well as taxation and insurance requirements. They also need to understand the tourism industry and the profile of visitors and need to be able to plan tours for their visitors.**

### **C.1 Business Skills Requirements**

Regulations and visitor profiles may vary from place to place and legislation from country to country. This module may be acquired theoretically and assessed in written or oral examinations.

### **C.2 Business Skills Modules**

- The tourism industry and tourist guide profession
- Running a tourist guiding business, marketing, local rules and regulations, tax & insurance
- Tour planning
- Customer care, including health and safety

## **D. LANGUAGE SKILLS**

**It is essential that tourist guides are proficient in any language in which they guide visitors. Therefore, tourist guides in FEG member countries should be assessed in any non-mother tongue language according the FEG guidelines agreed at the EGM in Siracusa in 2004.**

### **D.1 FEG Language Testing Requirements**

Tourist guides or trainees on courses must apply to take a language proficiency test in any language/s in which they aspire to guide other than their mother tongue.

The FEG system of language testing is very much geared to the real needs of professional tourist guiding. A tourist guide must be able to hold the attention of a group for as much as several full days guiding, according to the level of the audience. Information conveyed to visitors must be instantly comprehensible.

The basic criteria developed for language testing are also based on feedback from consumers and users of tourist guide services regarding tourist guiding in various languages. The tourism industry and the tourist guiding profession in particular have always been characterised by the beneficial and welcome presence of people of many nationalities and ethnic backgrounds. Language testing policies have no discrimination based upon race or nationality. What determines where or in what language a person guides is solely a matter of qualification.

Further information about the level or standard and format of the tests is available on application.

## **Conclusion**

The nature of tourist guiding is changing e.g. there is a reduction in the number of coach panoramic tours but growth in niche markets, educational markets and in walking tours. This Paper addresses these changes in establishing common qualification requirements for tourist guiding.

Although some modules of the tourist guide qualification can be acquired in theoretical studies, practical training is necessary for tourist guides. The most effective form of training is by combining acquired area-specific core knowledge with practical application of practising skills. Area-specific knowledge must be trained and examined in the location of the qualification and in the language of the host country.

Therefore FEG recommends the setting-up of special training programmes for tourist guides combining core knowledge, communication skills, guiding techniques and business skills and - if required – job-related language proficiency in all EU Member States.

To facilitate the movement of professional services, FEG recommends that EU Member States recognise the non-area specific modules of language proficiency and practising skills that have been successfully completed by qualified tourist guides in other EU Member States. In the event that qualified tourist guides who have completed these non area-specific modules wish to work in another city, region or country, their non-area specific qualifications would be recognised providing the tourist guide has completed the appropriate area specific core knowledge modules for the new city, region or country.

This Way Forward paper for Tourist Guide training in Europe was adopted unanimously by all 19 member countries of FEG on the 25<sup>th</sup> February 2006.

**FEG believes this is the road map that should be followed to achieve high standards in Tourist Guide Training.**

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