

BADGE

1st External Assessment Report

September 2014





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Introduction and methodology

This is the first of two annual external evaluation reports prepared as agreed in the evaluation subcontract between Danmar Computers and Europe Evaluation Company Ltd. It covers the period until September 2014.

Two 'levels' of activities were foreseen by the project consortium: (a) internal monitoring activities of the partners' coordination and cooperation (through P1), which considered largely feedback regarding project coordination procedures and the communication between partners, and (b) the external evaluation (through the external agent), which was concerned largely the formative development of specific workpackages, along with the development and execution of the project from an external perspective – both in terms of the project as a whole and its outcomes, impacts and exploitation potential. In addition, the external evaluator's role was seen as supportive of the project and the consortium, helping it to maintain direction and develop further value-addedness.

The original BADGE proposal called for evaluation (and project monitoring) to be undertaken both as a function of one partner (P1) and also through the auspices of a subcontracted external evaluator. How these two would interact was defined later in the project's Handbook of Quality Benchmarks, produced during the first month of the project.

As expressed in the Handbook two 'levels' of assessment were foreseen by the project consortium: Firstly the formative development of specific workpackages to be examined by P1. Secondly, an assessment of the whole project by someone external to the project (the external evaluator), which was concerned largely with the development and execution of the project both in terms of the project as a whole and its outcomes, impacts and exploitation potential. In addition, the external evaluator's role was seen as being supportive of the project and the consortium, helping it to maintain direction and develop further value-addedness.

In addition to this external (outside) 'view', a role of P1 was to undertake assessment from within the project ('internal'), including monitoring of such aspects as the meetings, partner cohesion and coordination, etc. The outcomes of this work are not included in this report.

It was agreed that most of the external assessment would be questionnaire based and, for the project development and assessment activities, a timetable was developed whereby questionnaires would be distributed to partners for completion. The (P1) workpackage-based questionnaires were to be distributed towards the start of each workpackage and also towards the end. Since they were



intended to provide a more longitudinal view of the project, however, the external questionnaires were to be distributed at six monthly intervals over the lifetime of the project. Information generated by the (P1) work-package questionnaires would be integrated into the the overall external assessment as appropriate.

This procedure was adopted successfully for the first internal (for WP2) and external questionnaires. However, it became apparent that having both a workpackage and a longitudinal set of evaluation procedures created a number of potential problems for the partnership. Thus, with the internal questionnaires being WP-related, the completion dates were defined by the project structure rather than by the calendar. So more than one WP questionnaire might have to be completed at the same time, leading to work burdens and confusion. Also, with a large and distributed partnership like that of BADGE, potential confusion could arise as to the ‘meaning’ of each questionnaire – particularly when they are distributed by different partners/subcontractors at the same time. Finally, while a WP-based approach will provide detailed information about the progress/development of individual workpackages, it does not easily allow partners to assess the interaction of workpackages as they lead to a coherent ‘whole’ of the project.

Following the first set of questionnaires, therefore, it was agreed that the two should be ‘merged’ so that the same information is obtained but on a regular basis – every four months rather than irregularly (work-package) and six monthly (external). Further, the responsibility for developing and collecting this information was given to the external assessor, while P1’s role would be to oversee the internal assessment processes mentioned above and to use the information generated by the external assessment process to help steer the project to successful conclusion.

By taking this approach the monitoring and evaluation activities provide clearer developmental information about the project, the partnership, its work and its progress. Also, by requiring detailed consideration of all aspects of the project’s work, aims, objectives, and outputs on a regular and repeating basis, partners will have a better opportunity to review regularly the project’s overall plan, direction and workpackage interactions. This will lead to a more coherent and successful partnership and project.



External assessment

The overall approach for the external assessment has been to undertake two forms of evaluation: formative and summative. Formative evaluation generally takes place throughout the project to ensure that it develops effectively and successfully. Summative evaluation generally occurs more towards the end of the project, when results are available and when the information can be beneficial for further development and exploitation purposes (as well as to demonstrate the value and value-addedness of the work).

Since this is the first of the two assessment reports and is being presented half way through the project, the focus of this part deals largely with formative assessment. The second, final, report will provide a more summative evaluation.

The external self-evaluation questionnaire distributed to, and completed by, all partners covered six primary aspects of the BADGE project:

1. BADGE objectives
2. BADGE impacts
3. BADGE workplan
4. European added value
5. Publicity and awareness raising
6. The BADGE Partnership

The following is a brief summary of partners' assessments of the different aspects over the first eight months of the project (November 2013-June 2014). During this period two self-evaluation questionnaires were distributed (the third questionnaire – July-October – extends beyond the end of the interim report period).

BADGE objectives

The BADGE agreement provides six explicit objectives. Partners were asked to assess the progress towards each objective and the extent to which they felt the partnership work was helping them to understand the impact each objective on both themselves and their stakeholders.

Objective 1: To empower entrepreneurial women facing double disadvantage to start up their own businesses



Ratings were consistently high over the questionnaires for this objective. Partners generally felt that the project was 'quite' to 'very well' facilitating progress towards the objective, helping partners to understand the potential barriers faced by entrepreneurial women, and understand the kinds of disadvantages faced by entrepreneurial women. The early work undertaken by the partnership to develop needs assessments of their potential stakeholders was felt to be an important contributor to this effect.

Objective 2: Support soft skills development to empower women experiencing double disadvantage for employability and self-employment

Although also high, perceptions for this objective were slightly more skewed towards the central 'OK' category. Again, the distribution did not shift over the two questionnaires. Support for soft skills was understood to be an important feature of the project and, again, the needs assessment and skills mapping aspects of the project has contributed to better understanding.

Objective 3: Support the development of self-efficacy, regaining confidence and motivation for work

Perceptions for this objective were centred firmly in the 'quite well' area of the rating scales, although a general comment was made that this objective has probably not yet had time to be strengthened within the life cycle of the project. However, it is one that will become increasingly apposite as the project shifts into its second year and will need to be reviewed in detail by the partnership.

Objective 4: Equip VET trainers with innovative, engaging, tailored support methodologies

Feelings that the project is not yet mature enough to be able to substantiate this aspect of the work were also expressed for this objective. Again, more strength may be given to it following the technology workpackages.

Objective 5: Decrease isolation felt by women experiencing double disadvantage

Over the two questionnaire periods a distinct trend could be observed to suggest that perceptions about this objective became firmer towards the 'quite well'/'very well' end of the ratings. The dissemination activities set up within the project, including Facebook and the commencement of piloting, led partners generally to perceive a more positive direction.

Objective 6: Make VET practices more attractive to under-represented groups



Similar conclusions to those of objective 5 (above) can be generated here. Again, as more project activities are undertaken, including the assessment of needs and generation of meetings, partners began to feel that the project is progressing very positively towards making VET practices more attractive to under-represented groups.

BADGE impacts

The BADGE agreement provides a number of expected impacts, views about which are summarised below. Partners were also asked to indicate what they feel has been the *overall* impact of the BADGE project from the viewpoint of the BADGE work and activities and also of ‘me/my organisation/my country’.

Partners generally felt that the impacts provided by the project overall were largely a function of the work methodology employed – that of reaching out to doubly disadvantaged women through needs assessments, group meetings, social media, etc. In this regard the project appears to be viewed most positively by the stakeholders already engaged and expectations are expressed that this will strengthen as the project develops.

With regards partners’ own institutions, countries, etc., similar perceptions are generally felt. Thus the very act of outreach is perceived as a positive benefit to the partners themselves since they understand better many of the issues involved and feel they are more equipped to further benefit under-represented groups.

Impact 1: Women experiencing double disadvantage will be equipped with soft skills development tools to continue to build employability skills, looking at aspects such as self-reflection, transferable skills, communication, leadership, etc.

Over both questionnaire periods partners felt that the project has been ‘quite’ to ‘very well’ progressing towards this impact. This is happening by the project providing knowledge (supported by the research and needs assessment), experience (of partners), effective training materials, and foci for meetings and discussion.



Impact 2: Greater numbers of women facing double disadvantage will be more confident in their journey to self-employment

As with impact 1, partners felt that this impact is developing well. As long as the project is promoted well, the provision of targeted support from trainers and mentors, along with examples of already successful women, is likely to ensure that the impact will be strengthened as the project progresses.

Impact 3: VET trainers and other stakeholders working with women experiencing double disadvantage will have access to an innovative, dynamic methodology

The Business Advisor's Toolkit, the participation of VET trainers in focus groups and other meetings, and the development of relevant e-learning courseware are felt by partners to help the project work to success.

BADGE workplan

Effectiveness and general direction of the seven workpackages that constitute the overall BADGE workplan were separately assessed. By considering each workpackage in turn – in each iteration of the questionnaire – partners were given a periodic opportunity to review their own understanding of the project, its structure and coherence.

In the second questionnaire a further (one-off) item was added (Reach a wider group of VET trainers) that was based on the suggestion made by the NA following its interim report. Summary information from these responses are added below to that generated by P1 as a part of the internal evaluation work.

WP1 Project management & quality assurance

Assessed overall to be positive. Meetings were well attended and well planned. Over the period there developed a more cohesive view of the partnership, along with a better understanding of the use of project management methodologies employed. Goals have been achieved and misunderstandings clarified. Some concern was expressed about the amount of financial record keeping and reporting, although there was understanding that these are requirements of the National Agency rather than the co-ordinating partner.



WP2 Assessment of needs

This workpackage concluded during the current assessment period, to the satisfaction of all partners. As expressed above, there was a general perception that the activities undertaken had helped to strengthen the project and partner understanding.

WP3 Adaptation of workshops/training of trainers

This workpackage did not start during the period of the first questionnaire but was largely held during the second questionnaire period. Partners felt that the outcomes largely met their expectations, although some felt that extra training could have been beneficial. Despite this, no partner felt that any changes were likely to have improved the overall outcome of the workpackage.

WP4 Piloting business workshops and target groups

AS with WP3, WP4 started after the start of the project and so comments were only meaningful to assess from the second self-evaluation questionnaire. Activities undertaken by partners involved identification and recruitment of target groups, and development and translation of the Learner's Kit. All partners reported positive outcomes for this workpackage, without any suggestions for change.

WP5 Development of e-learning platform & online community

As with WPs 3 and 4, this work started after the first questionnaire. In the second questionnaire partners reported considerable activity and discussion, particularly through Facebook. Stakeholders have been invited to participate and the general feeling is of a useful start to conversation. It would be good to develop regular statistical reporting for this activity – number of 'followers', 'likes', etc., over time.

WP6 Dissemination

From the start there appears to have been considerable activity with this workpackage, including publications, website development, newsletters, posters, etc.

WP7 Exploitation

Although the first questionnaire suggested that relatively little work had been done for this workpackage the situation was reversed for the second questionnaire, following the partnership meeting in Poland. An exploitation strategy is being developed along with an IPR agreement. It is



important that this activity (particularly the development of an effective strategy) is continued and enhanced during the lifetime of the project, not just when results become more concrete.

European added value

To help partners to place the European project and its outcomes into better context in each questionnaire they were asked to consider how they feel the partnership is adding value to (a) the BADGE work and activities and (b) their own organisation/country. This kind of information should have considerable benefit to the partnership when considering exploitation and sustainability issues. At this stage partners seemed to find some difficulty in distinguishing between these two categories and so the responses are combined in the table below:

Perceived added value of the partnership

Questionnaire 1

- *The exchange of experiences and good practices among the consortium, identification of new partners and extension of networking, generation of new knowledge with an EU wide perspective.*
- *Awareness and better understanding of the problems BADGE's address in a European level*
- *Better intercultural understanding and cross-cultural learning*
- *Raising awareness of European initiatives to grassroots levels through focus group recruitment and discussion of the project*

Questionnaire 2

- *Learning of new methods which will be implemented in partnership countries; better understanding of the situation in the partnership countries*
- *Networking and sharing resources between the partners - to develop a common outcome reflecting the needs of multiple EU members*
- *Implementing a borderless, pan-European solution, better inter-cultural understanding, various instruments for long-life learning*
- *Understanding the needs of target groups in other European countries and how they differ*
- *Learning about the current situation of female entrepreneurs across Europe*



- *Experiencing different working practices and ways of looking at issues across different cultures*
 - *Exchange of experiences best practices among partners through increased networking and during meetings*
 - *Invitation and creation of a potential VET trainer's community that will reflect the importance of soft skills enhancement for starting up a business*
 - *Highlighting the importance of soft skills to countries which may not have previously understood them; developing instruments and issues for entrepreneurial education of women facing double disadvantage*
 - *Good opportunities to sharing experience in business with success and real businesswoman (case studies)*
-

Publicity and awareness raising

In each questionnaire partners were asked to rate the extent to which they felt that the project in publicising/disseminating information ('very well' to 'not well at all') about:

- The work of the BADGE project
- Barriers facing entrepreneurial women
- Soft skills development
- The provision of materials and methodologies
- Improved confidence of entrepreneurial women

Two very positive outcomes emerge from the questionnaires. First, as discussed above, there has been a considerable amount of dissemination activity within the partnership. Second, on each of the criteria above, partners felt significantly more inclined to rate towards the 'very well' end of the scale as the project progressed (i.e. from Questionnaire 1 to Questionnaire 2).

The BADGE partnership

A similar trend to the issue of publicity (above) can also be observed when partners were asked to rate the quality of the partnership itself (development as a working partnership; co-ordination; help towards: addressing issues, awareness of issues, and development of support for entrepreneurial



women). Although strong positivity was expressed in the first questionnaire this was strengthened in the second.

Summary

As explained in the introduction this interim evaluation report is essentially formative in character; it is not summative. The purpose of the work is to help the multinational partnership develop its project as planned and for the outputs to be effective, sustainable and exploitable. The concept of a 'summary' at this stage, therefore, is counter-intuitive.

Thus the only summary that is meaningful is to assess the extent to which the partnership is maintaining its track. The above demonstrates that this is, indeed, the case. As one partner commented about the partnership: "The project is developing well, all activities are on track. The partnership is good".