



Final evaluation of VocMat 2

Transfer of Innovation

January 2010



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Executive Summary

The final evaluation of VocMat 2 aimed to explore how well the project met its objectives and to recommend actions for the future of the training model. This report details our findings of the research.

VocMat 2 transfers the innovation from the pilot project

Building on the success of the VocMat project in its first phase, VocMat 2 is a Transfer of Innovation project¹. It aims to develop further the innovation created through VocMat in its pilot phase and transfer it to new partner countries that had identified a need – Spain, Malta and Turkey. The Research and Development Group developed the training modules. These are delivered through a virtual learning environment using an educational platform. The Pilot Group, which involves the target group and potential users, has a key role in testing results and exchanging best practice. The model uses a mix of on-line and face-to-face delivery.

The rationale is clear and still valid

From the original research to its current activity the VocMat project has followed a clear logic. There is evidence the need for the project was identified and confirmed through different forms of research, by different organisations and bodies and at different stages. The key funder – the competitive Leonardo programme through the National Agency - actively encouraged what VocMat is doing by supporting two phases of the project. VocMat activity has a clear rationale that is still valid.

Resources were suitable for making the project work

Running the project needed large-scale resources – mainly staff time and funding. VocMat 2 received a Leonardo grant of €300,000 which covered 75% of the total project costs. Grant allocations to partner organisations were based on partners' role and agreed input. Partners provided the match funding of 25% of project costs.

A strong partnership is a key feature of the VocMat project. Overall partners have shown commitment to fulfilling their role. Three partners decided to withdraw from the project. This was not a sign of weakness but of awareness of their responsibilities. The changes made it possible to bring new, adequately resourced partners on board. Partners reallocated tasks and funding more effectively. The mix of organisations - with each country bringing an education partner to the table – provided the right skills and expertise for the project. Having learned through the pilot project, financial allocations reflected the planned activity and workloads of individual partners.

¹ The aim of Leonardo da Vinci Multilateral Projects 'Transfer of Innovation' is to improve the quality and attractiveness of the European VET system by adapting and integrating innovative content or results from previous Leonardo da Vinci Projects, or from other innovative projects into public and/or private vocational training systems and companies at the national, local, regional, or sectoral level.

VocMat 2 achieved what it set out to do

VocMat has met its tangible targets and mostly completed milestones on time. The evidence shows that contents of existing modules are still relevant to the target groups' needs. For any future modules it may be useful to carry out more research to help with ranking of subject areas. Users value the model's flexibility, now further improved during VocMat 2, but some technical problems persist. Users felt suitably supported by tutors and the project team.

The project successfully adapted and customised modules to partner countries' needs. The project made much progress towards achieving transparent and transferable accreditation even if the original objective of an EU-level accreditation was unachievable.

Employer support is important

Some pilot group members experienced the same barriers as in VocMat 1 – lack of time, heavy workloads and possibly lack of support from within the organisation. Getting employers' buy in – through recognition and encouragement as well as financial support - is an important goal for dissemination activities. VocMat has convinced the respondents to our employers' survey of its value to organisations. Finance continues to be a barrier to people taking up training so the more affordable VocMat training remains the better.

Participants value opportunities for sharing ideas

Partners as well as users value opportunities for sharing ideas and good practice as one of VocMat's key features. The project identified a great interest in the industry to learn from each other. Learners value the contact the social elements offer. Working mostly alone, they value the on-line chats and discussions as it makes them feel part of a group.

Wide exposure through active dissemination of results

Evidence shows that all partners have been actively disseminating project results in their own countries but also at European level and VocMat has had a lot of exposure. Guided by a detailed valorisation plan, partners have been communicating successes to potential end users, decision makers and industry bodies through a range of methods. The most important route are the networks partners have links or access to.

Business model needs to be sustainable

Partners have signed an intellectual property rights agreement to run VocMat commercially. This is suitable for securing the main achievements to a certain extent but there are some risks and issues that need to be addressed, most of which come down to finance. We recommend that partners explore the delivery options in more depth and suggest licensing the product through commercial trainers in each EU country.

VocMat has significant strengths to build on

To make a real difference to skills levels, mobility and training systems needs a high take up of the training among the target groups. The next step has to be extensive marketing to convince potential trainees, their employers and relevant organisations of the value of the modules. The flexibility of delivery and opportunities for sharing best practice at transnational level are the key selling points. Considering the quality and strength of the partnership, participating organisations are in a good position to take the project forward.

Some lessons from the VocMat experience

In interviews partners identified some key lessons they have learned from the VocMat experience, including:

- Chose your partners carefully and keep in mind that people work at different rates. You need established partners with the right experience.
- For training development direct involvement of higher and further education institutions is crucial to ensure compatibility with and integration into programmes.
- The project needs clear responsibilities and an overseeing role.
- Distant learners have more motivation when they feel part of a community and can exchange ideas and experiences with others.
- There is a real interest in the tourism industry to learn from one another.

Introduction

Building on the success of the VocMat project in its first phase, VocMat 2 is a Transfer of Innovation project. It aims to develop further the innovation created through VocMat in its pilot phase and transfer it to new partner countries. This report sets out the findings of the final evaluation and recommends actions for the future of the training model.

The VocMat 2 project

Background

Previous research by tourism organisations – some of which later became partners in the VocMat project - identified skills gaps and a need for flexible management training in a vocational setting. To address these needs, partners from the UK, Estonia and Iceland attracted funding under the Leonardo da Vinci programme for vocational training. The VocMat pilot project ran from October 2005 to September 2007 as a transnational partnership project aiming to develop a training model to improve tourism management skills within the European tourism sector.

Through effective dissemination other organisations became aware of VocMat's achievements and several expressed an interest in joining the project. Partners successfully applied for further Leonardo funding to run a second phase under the *Multilateral Projects - Transfer of Innovation* funding stream.

Transfer of Innovation through VocMat 2

VocMat 2 aimed to develop further the innovative training model and transfer it to new partner countries that had identified a need for the project – Spain, Malta and Turkey. Specifically, the project's key objectives were to:

- Develop further and adapt results to the new countries and make them available to their tourism and related sectors;
- Provide accreditation for learning achieved through the VocMat programme;
- Deliver innovative training products, procedures and processes in all partner languages; and
- Share best practice between tourism organisations across Europe.

The Research and Development Group developed the training modules. These are delivered through a virtual learning environment using an educational platform. The Pilot Group, which involves the target group and potential users, has a key role in testing results and exchanging best practice. The model uses a mix of on-line and face-to-face delivery.

During the project the membership of the partnership changed and we will comment on this later in the report. Iceland left the project but Italy joined as a new partner country.

The evaluation

Baseline work

Figure 1 - VocMat 2 impact chart

Need (baseline)	Activity	Outputs - VocMat II	Intermediate (short term) Impacts	(Long term) Impacts
<p>Low skills levels in existing VocMat modules (average 35% of participants rated current skills poor or very poor).</p> <p>Consistent demand for current VocMat modules (average 71% identified great or very great need for these skills)</p>	Developing new training modules	Module 2 developed & revised		Access to accredited learning for those with difficulty sourcing full or part-time education through difficulties of location
<p>Poor availability of and access to training, particularly in online delivery, materials and assessment</p>	Producing supporting materials		Opportunities for filling identified skills and knowledge gaps	Improved skills and increased knowledge through exchange of best practice nationally and transnationally
<p>Lack of recognised qualifications</p>	Working toward accreditation	EU level accreditation achieved	Increased skills levels and partnership working	Better skilled and qualified management staff
<p>Lack of partnership working among tourism organisations</p>	Innovative means of delivery identified	6 transnational chat room discussions, led by subject leaders	Filling identified skills and knowledge gaps	Improved skills and increased knowledge through exchange of best practice nationally and transnationally
<p>Need for support to project participants</p>	Support provided to learners	<p>3 Seminars/ workshops</p> <p>4 focus groups</p> <p>50% attendance at seminar or video conference (induction seminar/ launch test phase 1)</p> <p>75% attendance at seminar or video conference (induction seminar/ launch test phase 2)</p>	Improved contents and availability of vocational training (geographically and in different formats)	As a long-term result, vocational training systems will be more coherent across Europe, thus making the EU economy more competitive (Lisbon Objectives)
<p>Low utilisation of available training</p>		60 Pilot Group members recruited		Increased mobility within tourism and related sectors
<p>Gaps in existing research</p>	Pilot group meetings	<p>6 transnational chatroom discussions</p> <p>1 transnational discussion board per module</p> <p>1 national/ regional online forum per module</p>		Transparent and transferable vocational qualifications
<p>Low levels of awareness and poor reputation of tourism industry</p>	Dissemination activity	<p>Valorisation plan delivered</p> <p>Review and increase database: 1000 contacts representing tourism and other sectors</p> <p>Email and press campaigns in all partner countries</p> <p>Website development</p> <p>24 instances of communication with partners</p> <p>3 presentations delivered by each partner</p> <p>Attendance at 3 LdV events</p> <p>150 seminar attendees at EUTO study visit</p>		Partner countries have vocational training systems that are innovative in terms of technology and industry developments

Source: Hall Aitken baseline research

As part of the overall evaluation we carried out some research to help with setting a baseline. This early research was about identifying the areas where the project aimed to make a difference and assessing if the processes that were in place and activities partners had planned would be suitable for achieving the objectives. The VocMat 2 impact chart in Figure 1 above, produced for the baseline report, shows the programme logic behind VocMat and the relationship between needs, activity, outputs and impacts:

We will refer to the findings from the baseline research where we discuss the respective topics.

Evaluation questions

The final evaluation aimed to explore how well the project has met its objectives and to recommend actions for the future of the training model. We developed a set of questions the research would address:

Figure 2- Research questions

Evaluation topic	Research question
Addressing needs of the target group	1a Were the needs of the target group addressed through the VocMat model?
	1b Do the materials now meet the needs of the wider partnership? (relevance to the needs of the market place)
	1c What approaches are used to disseminate and what lessons can we learn?
Accreditation	2a What progress is the project making towards providing accreditation?
Customising project results	3a How well are the VocMat model and modules customised for all partners and beneficiaries? (language/ references/ terminology)
Sharing best practice	4a How much best practice is shared?
	4b What have project partners learned from it?

Method

Our method complemented the feedback gathering exercises undertaken within the project. We carried out:

- Desk research using the results of pilot group and end-user surveys provided by the project, as well as other relevant documents;
- Telephone interviews of project partners – six partners were available for interview;
- A partnership assessment exercise by e-mail – three partners returned the completed form; and
- An e-survey of pilot group participants’ employers. We received 11 employer e-mail addresses and seven survey responses.

Report structure

For this report we discuss the rationale for VocMat 2 and what goes into the project, before looking at what it has achieved as a result and what this means for the model's future. The rest of the document is structured as follows:

Rationale for VocMat – did it build on a valid rationale and what were the expectations of partners and target groups?

Resources – the resources allocated and used by the project;

Activities and achievements – the activities and related outcomes; and

The future of VocMat – a summary conclusion and lessons for the future of the training model.

Rationale for VocMat

In this chapter we take a look back at why the VocMat project was developed and the needs it set out to meet.

Why VocMat?

As explained in the funding application², the project addresses the lack of quality management training and a need for capacity building in the European tourism industry. From the first phase of VocMat, partners carried out extensive research on tourism training needs and availability of vocational training systems in Europe. The issue of management training, and the lack of it, had also been the subject of many discussions within the European Union of Tourist Officers (EUTO). In individual countries this need was highlighted in national strategies and policies.

Partners from UK, Estonia and Iceland developed the project idea for what became the VocMat model. As it supported the objectives of the EU Leonardo da Vinci programme for vocational training VocMat managed to secure funding as a pilot project let by Tourist Board Training. Our evaluation of VocMat 1 confirmed that

- VocMat had been successful in addressing identified needs of the target group as contents seemed relevant and users liked the flexibility the system offers;
- Partners had built a strong partnership; and
- The project was well-managed.

During the first phase, organisations in other European countries were made aware of the project's achievements through effective valorisation and expressed an interest in joining. The extended partnership submitted a funding application to extend the programme. The application enabled partners to develop VocMat further by producing an additional module and refining its products and processes. The partnership now included Spain, Malta and Turkey. The funding application was successful and VocMat 2 was delivered as a Transfer of Innovation project.

Needs and expectations

Partners summarised their expectations as

- Improved skills;
- Better vocational training systems;
- Improved partnership working; and
- Transparent and transferable vocational tourism qualifications.

Early research by partners could not identify any comparable models to that of VocMat. It also identified a lack of provision for flexible and accessible management training leading to recognised qualifications. As in VocMat 1, partners carried out an assessment among pilot group participants, which identified skills levels and training needs relating to existing and new training modules. The research also identified

² Project application for VocMat 2 – Multilateral projects transfer of innovation, 2007

barriers to training the VocMat model needed to address. The results of the assessment fed into the work of project groups. We will comment on the results later in the report.

Project participants also had an expectation that VocMat should provide tourism industry-related qualifications and opportunities to exchange best practice with European colleagues.

Is the rationale valid?

From the original research to its current activity the VocMat project has followed a clear logic. There is evidence the need for the project was identified and confirmed through different forms of research, by different organisations and bodies and at different stages. The key funder – the competitive Leonardo programme through the National Agency - actively encouraged what VocMat is doing by supporting two phases of the project. VocMat activity has a clear rationale that is still valid.

Resources

Running the project needed large-scale resources – mainly staff time and funding. In this chapter we aim to assess if the resources that went into the project were appropriate for achieving its aims.

Financial input

VocMat 2 received a Leonardo grant of €300,000 which covered 75% of the total project costs. Grant allocations to partner organisations were based on partners' role and agreed input. Partners provided the match funding of 25% of project costs.

More than half of the budget went on staff costs. Another major item was travel and subsistence as the project involved several face-to-face meetings.

People and skills are key resources

Staff time and skills provided within a strong partnership were the key inputs for making the project work. Building on the experience from VocMat 1, the project had assigned clear roles and responsibilities to its partners from the outset. As well as a set of responsibilities shared by all partners, individual tasks were assigned by organisation and specific skills. Shared responsibilities were:

- Management
- Quality Control
- Valorisation (Promotion and selling on of VocMat)
- Administration
- Finance & Budget Control
- Working Group participation
- Monitoring & Evaluation.

Figure 3 below gives an overview of the partner organisations and their roles:

Figure 3 - Partners and roles

Partner	Country	Type of organisation	What they contribute
Tourist Board Training (TBT)/ VisitScotland	UK	Training organisation owned by national tourist board	Day-to-day management; project coordinator; leading the development of innovative training mechanisms and their piloting
Tourism Management	UK	Tourism industry organisation concerned	Assistance to project coordinator in

Partner	Country	Type of organisation	What they contribute
Institute (TMI)		with certification and recognition of qualifications	management and delivery; links to a wide range of networks; coordination of academic product development
Enterprise Estonia/ Estonia Tourist Board (EE)	Estonia	National tourist board – responsible for carrying out national tourism policy	Dissemination at national and local level
Catalan Association of Tourism Professionals (APTALC)	Spain (Catalonia)	Tourism industry association	Dissemination at national and local level
Malta Tourism Society	Malta	Tourism industry association	Dissemination at national and local level
Pärnu College of the University of Tartu	Estonia	Education institution	Recruiting participants; dissemination; development of modules and accreditation
Iceland School of Tourism (withdrew)	Iceland	Education institution	Recruiting participants; dissemination; development of modules and accreditation
University of Girona	Spain (Catalonia)	Education institution	Recruiting participants; dissemination; development of modules and accreditation
Foundation for Human Resource Development (FHRD) (withdrew)	Malta	Education institution	Recruiting participants; dissemination; development of modules and accreditation
University of Malta (replaced FHRD)	Malta	Education institution	Recruiting participants; dissemination; delivery of test modules
Sunglurlu Vocation and Technology Development Association	Turkey	Education institution	Recruiting participants; dissemination; delivery of test modules and accreditation
Sheffield Hallam University (SHU)	UK	Education institution	Develop and support the virtual learning environment (VLE);

Partner	Country	Type of organisation	What they contribute
			piloting of training modules; extensive experience of distance learning
Aberdeen Business School at Robert Gordon University (RGU) (withdrew)	UK	Education institution	Knowledge and expertise in devising training programmes, writing modules, innovative methods of assessment, international students
University of Florence (joined later)	Italy	Education institution	Recruiting participants; dissemination; delivery of test modules

Three organisations (as shown in the table) withdrew from the project, mainly because of resourcing problems. This meant that Iceland was no longer a partner in the project. However, Italy came on board through University of Florence, replacing Iceland School of Tourism. University of Malta took over the tasks assigned to FHRD. The other education partners absorbed Aberdeen Business School's workload.

Overall, partners we spoke to felt the project had not suffered through these changes which could have been challenging. The interim report³ clearly explained the impacts of partners leaving and joining, and the project's actions to minimise disruption. Interviewees commented positively on how the partnership had dealt with change and that it had possibly become even stronger despite some difficulties.

Having Italy on the team as a new partner was a gain as the new partners brought in a new perspective.



The project experienced further disruption when the status of the lead organisation TBT changed. Formerly a subsidiary of VisitScotland, TBT became fully integrated into the organisation. Although VisitScotland took on VocMat as one of TBT's obligations, the change had some impact on the project's smooth running, mainly because less administrative support was available to the project.

³ VocMat interim report to Ecotec, 2008

Partnership assessment exercise

As part of the baseline research we assessed the strength and quality of the partnership from the partners' view early on in the project. We chose the time of the Malta meeting in March 2008 as a reference point. Using the Hall Aitken Partnership Assessment Tool respondents rated the partnership against five core indicators, including internal dynamics, structure and value of the partnership. At baseline stage eight partners completed the forms, two thought partnership working had been excellent overall, five thought it had been good and only one found it satisfactory.

We repeated the exercise for the final evaluation but the response rate was too low for results to be representative. Only three of 17 contacts returned the forms. Two overall ratings were good, the third excellent. Respondents also added some comments to explain their scoring. One person suggested there had been problems with one partners not delivering on agreed actions.

Were the resources suitable?

A strong partnership is a key feature of the VocMat project. Overall partners have shown commitment to fulfilling their role. Three partners decided to withdraw from the project. This was not a sign of weakness but of awareness of their responsibilities. The changes made it possible to bring new, adequately resourced partners on board. Partners reallocated tasks and funding more effectively. The mix of organisations - with each country bringing an education partner to the table – provided the right skills and expertise for the project.

Having learned through the pilot project, financial allocations reflected the planned activity and workloads of individual partners.

Activities and achievements

In this chapter we look at the results the project has achieved through its range of activities to assess if the identified needs have been addressed.

Completing milestones and meeting targets

For the baseline report we pulled together the targets the project was working towards and the indicators for measuring progress. We revisited the table to comment on the results as in Figure 4 below:

Figure 4 - VocMat progress against targets

Indicator	Target	Progress
Involvement of partners		
No of meetings	7 meetings of Valorisation Group	✓
	7 meetings of R&D Group	✓
	7 meetings of Project Management Group	✓
No of video and audio conferences	No target	n/a
No of dissemination activities undertaken	Valorisation plan delivered	✓
	Review and increase database: 1000 contacts representing tourism and other sectors	950
	E-mail and press campaigns in all partner countries	No target but evidence of activity
	Website development	✓
	24 instances of communication with partners	✓
	3 presentations delivered by each partner	✓
	Attendance at 3 LdV events	1
	150 seminar attendees at EUTO study visit	120
	All partners trained in delivery process	✓
	Involvement of target group members	
No of pilot group meetings attended	3 Seminars/ workshops	Amended to mix of workshops and online discussions
	4 focus groups 50% attendance at seminar or videoconference (induction seminar/ launch	✓ 75%

	test phase 1) 75% attendance at seminar or videoconference (induction seminar/ launch test phase 2)	Not required as majority of pilot group from phase 1 went on to phase 2. Replaced with increase in transnational chatrooms, national discussion forums.
No of participants across target groups	60 Pilot Group members recruited	90
No of contributions to virtual learning environment (VLE)	6 transnational chatroom discussions 1 transnational discussion board per module 1 national/ regional on-line forum per module	✓ ✓ ✓
No of modules completed	2	2
Developing results		
No of modules completed	Module 2 developed and revised	✓
Accreditation achieved	EU-level accreditation achieved	Not available. Replaced by endorsements at national level ⁴ .
Innovative means of delivery identified		All mechanisms in the application were delivered. In addition, blogs became part of the assessments in the second module.
Support through project		
No of instances where support was provided through subject leaders	6 transnational chatroom discussions, led by subject leaders	✓ (7)
Quality management		
	Quarterly monitoring delivered (9x)	Amended to 7 periods because of pressure points on expenditure by partners.
	Project Management Group review (7x)	✓
	2 test phases and review	✓

Source: VocMat 2 baseline report and project manager

The table shows that the project achieved almost all its targets and exceeded some of those around pilot group activity. In total, 59 people across the six countries registered for the Strategic Management module and 58 for Enterprise and Innovation. Of these, 22 and 46 completed the modules respectively. 20 pilot group members completed both modules. Following withdrawals during and after the end of the Strategic Management module the project recruited further participants and, over the life of the project, 90 people took part.

We will comment on the issue of EU-level accreditation later in this report.

⁴ This change has been approved by the National Agency.

Training contents are suitable for addressing skills needs

To fix the baseline, the project had assessed skills levels and training needs through an e-survey of contacts on the VocMat database – covering a wide range of organisations from the target groups – and through focus group discussions. The assessment exercise was repeated through an e-survey of contacts near the end of the project which attracted 82 responses.

The main findings from the baseline research were:

- All four existing modules scored highly for training need;
- Strategic Management was the area most in need – 77.2% of respondents rated the need as great or very great;
- Of the areas the project had identified for possible development, training needs were greatest for Enterprise and Innovation where 75% rated them as great or very great; and
- Globalisation and International Business was an area where current skills were rated as poor or very poor by 71% of respondents.

Figure 5 below sets out the percentages from the two surveys that rated current skills levels as poor or very poor and training needs as great and very great, across different subject areas. Enterprise and Innovation is the latest module developed under VocMat.

Figure 5 - Skills and training needs by subject area

Skill Areas	Current levels (%very poor or poor)			Training need (%great or very great)	
	Baseline	Post project survey		Baseline	Post project survey
Existing Modules					
Strategic Management	41.0	43.2	Strategic Management	77.2	77.8
Tourism Marketing	35.7	42.2	Tourism Marketing	73.7	82.8
Human Resource Management	45.0	46.7	Human Resource Management	72.0	68.9
Operational Management	18.6	26.7	Operational Management	61.8	68.2
New Module Areas					
Enterprise and Innovation	52.6	41.9	Enterprise and Innovation	75.4	80.0
Globalisation and International Business	71.2	60.0	Globalisation and International Business	71.9	82.2
Sustainable Tourism	41.9	33.3	Sustainable Tourism	69.6	77.8

Tourism Destination Development	44.7	35.6	Tourism Destination Development	66.6	82.2
Project Management	38.0	40.0	Project Management	64.9	80.0
Heritage and Culture	32.7	33.3	Heritage and Culture	56.4	80.0
Financial Management	23.7	45.5	Financial Management	54.4	66.7

Source: VocMat end-user survey analysis September 2009

The summary of survey findings provided by the project points out that a larger proportion of respondents were pilot group participants or tutors in the post project survey than in the baseline survey. The report offers possible explanations for the survey results:

- The global economic crisis may have influenced the perceptions of the need for training in Globalisation and International Business. Previously the weakest subject area but with relatively low perceived training need at 71.9%, 82.2% per cent now rated the need for training as great or very great.
- The global recession may also have raised awareness of poor skills and training needs in Destination Development, Project Management and Financial Management.
- The final module delivered under VocMat 2 was Enterprise and Innovation which may explain why only 41.9% of respondents – many of them VocMat 2 participants - now perceived their skills levels as poor or very poor.

The majority of respondents post project were pilot group members from Strategic Management, as well as Enterprise and Innovation. In Strategic Management, there was only a slight increase in current levels of skills, and in Enterprise and Innovation skills levels had decreased significantly. Also, training needs in Strategic Management had hardly changed but in Enterprise and Innovation training needs had risen from 75.4% to 80%. This could be a reflection of the desire to delve deeper – given that the completion rate (88%) in and feedback on the latter was so positive. Training needs for other subject areas had all increased – except Human Resources – which is a sign that a market exists among target groups.

Overall, the evidence suggests the contents of existing as well as potential new module subjects are relevant to the target groups.

Our survey of pilot group members’ employers asked for management training needs more generally. All respondents thought there was a need for tourism management training in their organisation⁵. More than half (57.1%) thought the need was great. And all respondents felt the training through VocMat was making a difference. More than a quarter (28.6%) felt it was making a great difference.

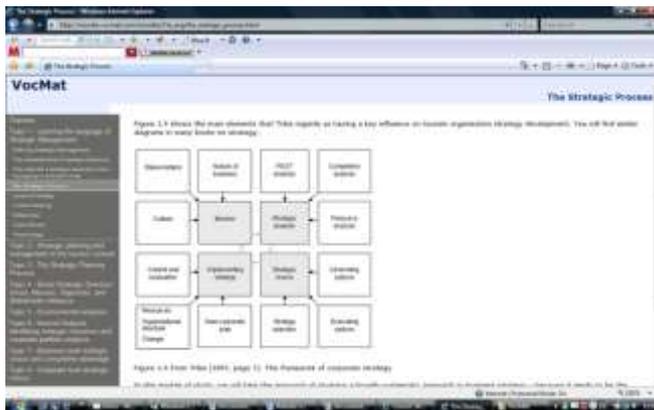
⁵ Please note that the survey population was very small and these statements are based on seven responses.

Users value flexible delivery

Flexibility is a key feature of VocMat as the model is designed to overcome barriers that stop people from accessing training. The baseline research identified high demand for distance learning with an element of face-to-face delivery as it allows participants to fit training around their daytime job. The final evaluation of VocMat 1 had highlighted scope for enhancing delivery further by improving support structures such as tutor support and on-line communication tools. The second phase of the project offered the opportunity to do this and fine-tune the model's delivery by:

- Moving to a different platform – Moodle - for the Virtual Learning Environment;
- Running transnational and national chat rooms at the same time;
- More support from local tutors who, for example, offered to feed into transnational discussions for participants where they could not comfortably speak in English;
- Breaking down the online assessments into several parts; and
- Encouraging learners to publish comments – and comments on other posts - on the VLE.

“VocMat has created for the first time a social international learning area with public and private operators of the European Tourism Industry” [VocMat user as quoted by a partner]



Although the move from the Blackboard to the Moodle platform has improved the virtual learning environment, one partner commented that it could be improved further, for example through using Skype or a similar service for on-line discussions.

Changing the style of on-line assessments by breaking them down into several steps

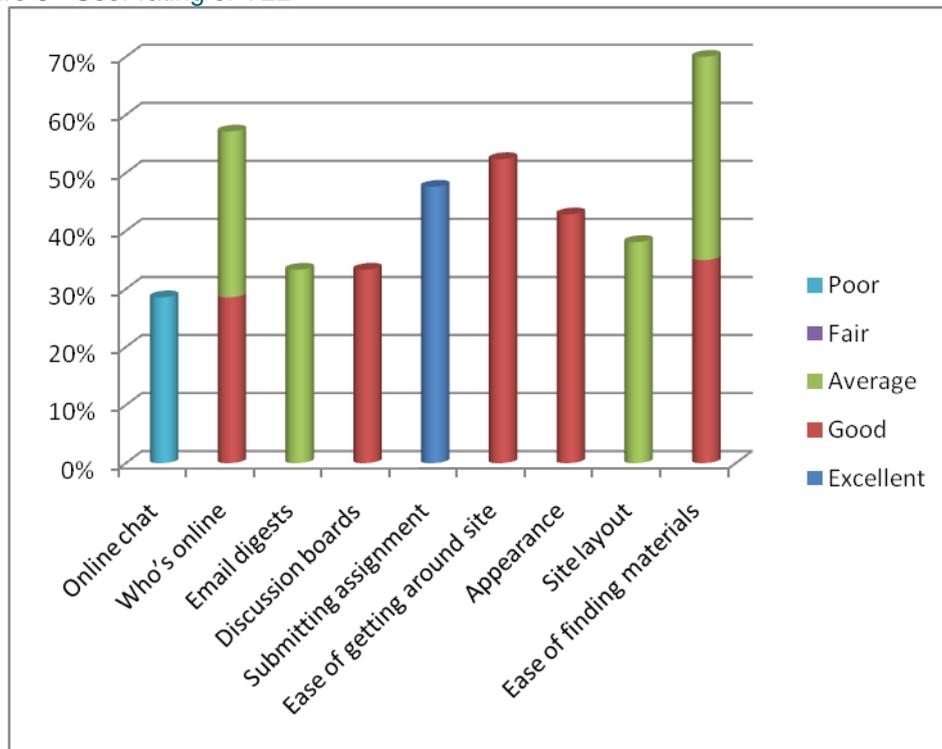
seems more effective than having one assessment at the end. The project successfully tested this new approach on the Enterprise and Innovation module.

Views on the Virtual Learning Environment (VLE)

User feedback on VocMat's delivery model was positive overall. However, views on the different aspects of the virtual learning environment were mixed. The project's feedback exercise explored the experience of pilot group members in using the VLE⁶. Figure 6 below shows user ratings:

⁶ 27 responses were received – of these, 20 respondents had completed Enterprise and Innovation only and seven had completed both modules.

Figure 6 - User rating of VLE



Source: VocMat 2 pilot group feedback survey

The numbers of “fair” and “poor” ratings for the community oriented aspects – online chat and discussion boards - suggest there is room for improvement. But a closer look at individual comments reveals that criticism is related to technical problems to do with speed and connection problems rather than the features not being useful. 12 of 18 respondents commented the on-line chat was good for exchanging ideas and experiences and for real-time contact with students and tutors. The number of “excellent” and “good” ratings for features like submitting assignments and ease of getting around are a sign of the VLE’s good usability. Some useful suggestions from users include creating a summary document of the best ideas and automatic receipts after submission of assignments.

The survey of end-users identified on-line training tools and methods as the most suitable methods, with printed material, with over 90% rating them as suitable or very suitable. And 90.5% also chose one-day courses as preferred delivery formats. These findings confirm the VocMat model of delivering training is in line with what the industry needs and wants.

Tutor support

Most pilot group respondents – 81% on average - thought the support they received from tutors, subject leaders and the project team was “about right”. Only one respondent criticised long delays in getting feedback. Contact had mainly been by e-mail or through the VLE.

Employer support is important

One conclusion from the final evaluation of VocMat 1 was that employers have to buy into the model to make it successful. This issue also came up during this evaluation. The project gathered feedback from pilot group members who withdrew without completing a module. These early leavers cited too much to do and lack of time available as the main reason. For some the timing of the module had also played a role which suggests that without the time constraints the completion rate may be higher. However, at 10% the drop-out rate was lower by the last module than in the pilot project.

Apart from users' own commitment, the support they get from their employers is important. The views of the employers that responded to our survey were positive throughout – all reported that VocMat training had already made a difference and they expected it to do so in the future. Also, 85.7% said they would encourage members of their organisation to undertake VocMat training. This feedback will be vital in selling the benefits of training commercially in future

However, there were also some pilot group members who did not want us to contact their employers because they did not know about the employee doing the training. This might be a sign that in those cases employers might not support the training.



In the project's survey of end-users one-third of respondents said they could undertake training within working hours "always" or "often". And around one quarter (26.2%) said their organisation paid for training. On the other hand, only 10% were willing to pay for it themselves. This implies that finance continues to be a barrier to people taking up training.

To create demand for VocMat in future, the benefits to businesses will have to be quantified and promoted to overcome the financial barrier we have identified. Creating a training product that provides businesses with an attractive return on investment will be a priority for the future.

The VocMat model is well adapted to countries' needs

VocMat meets market needs in partner countries

The early research across partner countries had identified a similar lack of provision for flexible and accessible training that led to recognised qualifications, for those already in management positions within the tourism industry. And discussions with individuals working in the industry had confirmed that although the education systems and qualification frameworks in different countries varied a lot, the training needs of employees were common across Europe.

VocMat aimed to ensure the model would meet the needs of the partnership in several ways:

- All partner countries were represented in the Research and Development Group;

- The composition of the pilot group participants reflected target groups across the partnership; and
- Continuing feedback, including testing of modules, assessed the model's relevance to those groups.

Organisations represented through the pilot group covered a wide range of private and public organisations and included tourist boards, travel operators, enterprise agencies, visitor attractions.

The R&D Group's remit involved developing marking schemes for an award that is transparent and opens the prospect of accreditation across national training systems.

Partners we interviewed confirmed the model has met the specific needs in their countries. Offering national discussion boards and national on-line chats as well as transnational ones increased the relevance to individual countries.

Increased relevance through customised results

VocMat also aimed to customise the modules for its partner countries, following feedback from the pilot. This mainly meant translating the module contents and supporting materials into all partner languages. Customising results also involved building examples and references into materials that are relevant to the user country. Online chats and discussions in national languages also helped to tailor the training model for users in different countries.

A key learning point from VocMat 1 had been to assign new resources to meet users' language needs. As shown in the project's milestone chart both Module 1 and Module 2 were translated into other partner languages during VocMat 2.

Our interviewees said the project had successfully customised project results overall and they understood the translations. Sometimes other partners worked closely with the module lead partner as the module was developed and translated materials as they went along, building in examples from their own countries. Feedback from the VocMat 2 pilot group⁷ includes no comments to suggest that language had been a problem for participants.

Users value opportunities for sharing best practice

Sharing best practice is an important aspect of Leonardo activity and the baseline research had confirmed that both partners and participants expected opportunities to exchange best practice with European colleagues. Feedback suggests the exchange of experience and ideas has worked well at both levels.

There is some evidence of networking benefit among partners, from informal discussions and feedback. Malta, for example, benefited from contact with Estonia as both were new EU countries. And as a Mediterranean tourism destination it also has much in common with Italy and Spain in terms of climate, culture and the tourism product. Several of the project partners had known one another for some time. They had already built relationships that strengthened further during VocMat 2.

⁷ VocMat 2 pilot group feedback survey - summary report provided by the project

Two project partners from Sheffield Hallam University and University of Girona, for instance, went to teach at another of the partner universities.

Sharing ideas and best practice between them – but also with new partners – was not restricted to formal contact such as working group meetings. As some partners confirmed in interviews there was much less formal communication around and between meetings.

Partners reported a real interest in the tourism industry to learn from each other. One indicator of this was the level of online interaction taking place in the pilot group. The results of the pilot group survey as well as the end user survey⁸ confirmed that users value opportunities to exchange best practice highly. 12 of 18 pilot group respondents found the online chat was good for exchanging ideas and experiences and have real time contact with other students and the tutors. The end-user survey attracted 82 responses from contacts on the VocMat database and explored the value of VocMat under different headings. 94.9% of end-users surveyed regarded the opportunity to exchange best practice with European colleagues quite or very important.

Partners made progress towards accreditation

One of VocMat's objectives was to provide accreditation and EU-wide recognised qualifications for learning achieved through the VocMat model. As we mentioned in the baseline report, partners realised early on that gaining an umbrella accreditation from an educational body at European Union level was ambitious. This is because cohesive accreditation systems across Europe are in development.

The milestone chart that details all activity undertaken by work package, shows the project was on track in working towards this objective. Partners identified professional bodies that could be targeted for approval and decided on a strategy for seeking approval. In interviews for this final evaluation project management said that no suitable body existed that could provide EU-level accreditation for VocMat. This had already been flagged up in the interim report, which also stated that – in anticipation of it being impossible to identify a suitable academic organisation – partners had begun to seek approval at national level. The National Agency approved this change of objective.

The aim was to provide transparent and transferable qualifications that are recognised by learners and employers throughout Europe. Although the objective of an EU-level accreditation could not be achieved as such, partners made good progress towards providing the benefits that come with an accreditation:

- VocMat uses the European Credit Transfer System – each module is worth 7.5 credits and learners can use them towards qualifications as well as VocMat itself.
- The project has produced a standard method for a marking scheme that allows national accreditation bodies to see clearly how awards are made and how they relate to their own systems;
- Partners have been successful in securing support of some key organisations such as trade bodies in their countries and are still working to get more

⁸ End user survey analysis September 2009 – summary report provided by the project

organisations to support VocMat. UK organisations that have issued letters of support include People 1st and the Institute of Hospitality.

- VocMat is well embedded in the course programmes of participating education institutions. University of Girona, for instance, wants to develop a masters-level degree building on VocMat results.

Effective management and processes

Interviewees commented positively on the way the project was managed. On a scale from one to five – with five being excellent – the average rating was just over four. Other partners recognised the hard work of the project manager and coordinator. Only the project manager commented that improvement was possible as the closure of TBT highlighted the management's large workload. Two interviewees commented on financial delays that had occurred. Interviewees also commented positively on internal communication overall.

As in VocMat 1, the milestone chart had an important role as a management and development tool. Management as well as other partners found the spreadsheet useful as it guided them through the project through detailed targets and deadlines for the tasks under each work package. One of these work packages covered the quality management tools applied by the project. These include the quarterly quality monitoring by all partners and the quarterly management group reviews which were delivered on time.

Wide exposure through active dissemination of results

All VocMat partners have a role in disseminating results and there is evidence of considerable activity across the partnership. Guided by a detailed plan the Valorisation Group adopted at the outset, partners have been communicating the project's successes to potential end users, decision makers and industry bodies through methods, including:

- Seminars;
- Forums and discussion boards;
- Email campaigns;
- Presentations and attendance at conferences;
- Project website and leaflets;
- Press releases; and
- Research and progress reports.

The project produced a PowerPoint presentation all partners could use.

Individual partners promote the project at national level. The Spanish partners, for instance, developed a dissemination plan for targeting the Spanish tourism industry which was presented to the national tourist board. As part of this, they used the university's communication team to spread news to the local press, TV and chambers of commerce. Other examples of valorisation activity include a TV interview with the project leader on Maltese television which had been organised by Malta Tourism Society.

The most important route for disseminating results are the networks partner organisations have links and access to. These include:

- European Union of Tourist Officers (EUTO) – EUTO has around three newsletters per year in which VocMat promotes its results to around 850 contacts;
- European Travel and Tourism Action Group (ETAG) - ETAG members include a range of European tourism industry organisations. EU Tourism Unit and UNWTO are observers;
- EU Tourism Unit at the European Commission's DG Enterprise and Industry;
- Tourism Management Institute (TMI) – VocMat is covered at eTMI event and many related events. Every issue of TMI's publication Destination Matters – an e-newsletter published three times each year – includes a one-page editorial on the project; and
- Regional administrations.

Partners confirmed the project has had much exposure in the tourism and related industries. Activities have been effective and indicators of that are number of enquiries and invitations to speak at events and conferences. For instance, one partner delivered a presentation at a major tourism conference⁹ in Italy. The project also presented to an EU seminar in Slovenia, organised by the EU Tourism Unit which has identified VocMat as an example of good practice. And the University of Florence recently received an invitation to speak at another important event - *Buytourisonline*¹⁰. The project has also noted interest from countries outside the partnership.

However, one management partner commented that, while other partners had been promoting the project in their own countries, they did not want to take a consistent role in writing press releases for wider coverage. Often this fell to the project coordinators based in the UK.

Reflecting on achievements

VocMat has met its tangible targets and mostly completed milestones on time. The evidence shows that contents of existing modules are still relevant to the target groups' needs. For any future modules it may be useful to carry out more research to help with ranking of subject areas. Users value the model's flexibility, now further improved during VocMat 2, but some technical problems persist. Users felt suitably supported by tutors and the project team.

Some pilot group members experienced the same barriers as in VocMat 1 – lack of time, heavy workloads and possibly lack of support from within the organisation. Getting employers' buy in – through recognition and encouragement as well as financial support - is an important goal for dissemination activities. VocMat has convinced the respondents to our employers' survey of its value to organisations. Testimonials and case study material should be available for spreading the message to others. Finance is already a barrier to people taking up training so the more affordable VocMat training remains the better.

⁹ *European universities for sustainable and competitive tourism*, Florence, June 2009

¹⁰ www.buytourisonline.com/index.php?BTO-novembre-2009

The project successfully adapted and customised modules to partner countries' needs. However, translating results into partner languages has been resource intensive and could cause financial problems in the future. The project made much progress towards achieving transparent and transferable accreditation even if the original objective of an EU-level accreditation was unachievable.

Partners as well as users value opportunities for sharing ideas and good practice as one of VocMat's key features. The project identified a great interest in the industry to learn from each other. Learners value the contact the social elements offer. Working mostly alone, they value the on-line chats and discussions as it makes them feel part of a group.

Partners see the project to be well-managed but, although the balance of workloads was better than in VocMat 1, the change at TBT revealed how much the project's smooth and efficient running still depended on a few active individuals.

Evidence shows that all partners have been actively disseminating project results in their own countries but also at European level and VocMat has had a lot of exposure. In the final chapter we will highlight some points to consider for the future.

The future of VocMat

In this final chapter we draw some conclusions on the project overall and identify the key lessons learned. We also comment on the future of the VocMat training model.

VocMat meets its objectives

The VocMat project follows a clear logic – from a well researched need right through to an achievable set of outcomes. Resources were suitable for delivering the project and an already strong partnership has become even stronger during this second phase. And the mix of organisations – with each country bringing an education partner to the table – can provide the right skills and expertise.

Having assessed the activities and achievements against the impact chart (Figure 1) in the introduction, we can confirm that VocMat 2 meets all targets - except for EU-level accreditation which was unobtainable at this stage. The question is now: what is the best way of making these achievements sustainable?

Intellectual property rights agreement is the route forward

The plan is to run VocMat commercially. Partners have signed an agreement¹¹ that outlines the relationship between them as well as the terms for advertising, promoting and delivering the model. The agreement is initially valid for two years and terms include that:

- The product will be advertised through the VocMat website;
- A coordinator will be appointed whose responsibilities will include liaising with partners about maintaining and updating materials;
- A person will be appointed for maintaining the VLE and providing support to students;
- Partner universities will ensure VocMat students have access to teaching staff and receive feedback; and
- Partners will charge a fee for the modules that reflects demand and delivery costs.

The two posts will only be filled if funds from student registration fees allow.

The agreement is a suitable vehicle for securing the main achievements of VocMat to a certain extent. The VocMat curriculum¹², developed in direct response to the training needs assessments, provides a tangible structure for the training system.

But, as partners will be aware, there are some risks, questions and issues that can influence development:

- The value proposition is underdeveloped so it will be difficult to sell without further work to prove benefits to employers to overcome the funding barrier.

¹¹ VocMat2 PP IPR Final Oct 09

¹² *The VocMat Curriculum*, 12/10/2009

- Will enough tutor support to learners – similar to the level provided under VocMat 2 - be feasible?
- Although delivery is mainly online users need and value some element of face-to-face contact – where will the resources come from in the future?
- How will staff changes in partner organisations affect VocMat provision and development?
- Will it be feasible to develop more modules to the same standard? What will happen, for example, to the needs assessment and feedback processes for testing modules?
- Will effective promotion be possible without a dedicated marketing budget?
- What is Plan B if fee income does not allow appointing a coordinator and someone to maintain the VLE?

Most of these issues come down to finance. As set out in the IPR agreement, VocMat users will have to pay a fee for registration and tuition. Some people have already raised concerns about students being able to pay, but also about partner organisations finding the necessary resources. Partners are exploring the possibility of accessing further EU funding, possibly from the Tempus programme which provides funding for higher education institutions and other bodies.

We recommend the partners explore the delivery options in more depth. We question the sustainability of the proposed business model and suggest licensing the product through commercial trainers in each EU country.

Building on VocMat's strengths

Leonardo funding has enabled the VocMat partnership to develop a training model that provides content and delivery to meet tourism needs across Europe. To make a real difference to skills levels, mobility and training systems needs a high take up of the training among the target groups. Now the training product is developed, attention will turn to marketing. This will demand more emphasis on learner and employer benefits.

So the next step has to be extensive marketing to convince potential trainees, their employers and relevant organisations of the value of the modules. The evidence suggests that partners have a commitment to keeping up dissemination activities using existing links and networks but this does not form a systematic (or even coordinated) marketing effort. As we already highlighted in the previous evaluation, the flexibility of delivery and opportunities for sharing best practice at transnational level are the key selling points. Considering the quality and strength of the partnership, participating organisations are in a good position to take the project forward. The milestone chart could continue to serve as a tool for structuring and guiding future activity.

Trainees and employers value VocMat's accreditation. Participating universities have now embedded modules in course programmes and partners will continue to seek support and recognition from relevant bodies. At the same time they should monitor and try to influence the possibility of the original objective of getting EU-level accreditation, which would bring major benefits in the long run.

Some lessons from the VocMat experience

In interviews partners identified some key lessons they have learned from the VocMat experience:

- Set out with a very clear idea of what you want to achieve.
- Choose your partners carefully and keep in mind that people work at different rates. You need established partners with the right experience.
- The structure of the training must allow adapting quickly to market changes to be competitive.
- Start preparing for the longevity of your results as early as possible.
- Be aware of and realistic about cost implications of activities.
- For training development direct involvement of higher and further education institutions is crucial to ensure compatibility with and integration into programmes.
- The project needs clear responsibilities and an overseeing role.
- Distant learners have more motivation when they feel part of a community and can exchange ideas and experiences with others.
- There is a real interest in the tourism industry to learn from one another.

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