



business advisor

VETBA Full Pilot Testing Report

KEY OUTCOMES, May 14th 2012

# ***Vocational Education and Training for Business Advisors***

## **VETBA**



business advisor

### ***Full Pilot Testing Report***

**Introduction, Learning Help Options, How to Write a Case Study, Business Coaching, Business Strategy, Marketing, Finance, Business Planning, Global Considerations, Main Conclusions & Recommendations**



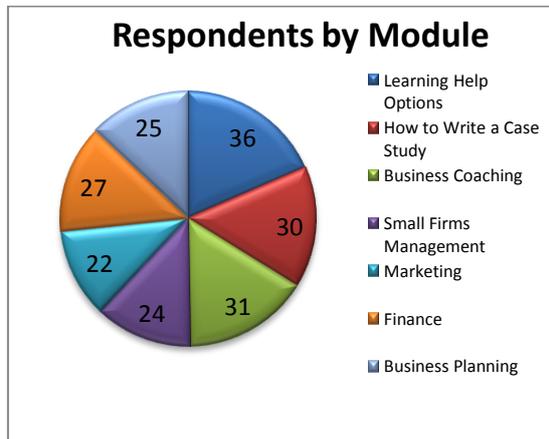
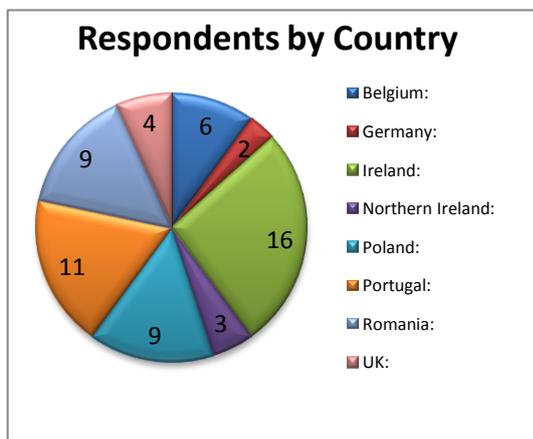
**INTRO:**

This report aims at summarizing all the valuable inputs on VETBA modules received from Business Advisors across Europe in order to ameliorate and fine-tuning contents and technicalities of the full VETBA e-learning course ([http://www.spi.pt/VETBA\\_elearning](http://www.spi.pt/VETBA_elearning)). The proposed comments will be taken into account for editing the training before it will be translated in other 3 languages and made publicly available.

A first Pilot Testing had been already implemented in January 2012 when project partners have tested 3 modules and answered a short questionnaire. The outcomes of that mini pilot testing have been taken into account by partners in ameliorating the questioned modules, finalizing the rest of the training, and further developing the questionnaire for the collection of Business Advisors' feedback on the full e-learning course (see Annex 1, **VETBA Mini Pilot Test Questionnaire Report**).

**THE SURVEY:**

The present report is based on the results of a survey conducted among 60 Business Advisors: each of them has been asked to test at least one module of the whole training course and give his/her feedback answering to the corresponding section of the questionnaire developed on SurveyMonkey (<http://www.surveymonkey.com/s/795D8HV>).



The Pilot Testing phase has been launched on Monday April, 16<sup>th</sup> and it has been closed Wednesday May, 9<sup>th</sup>.

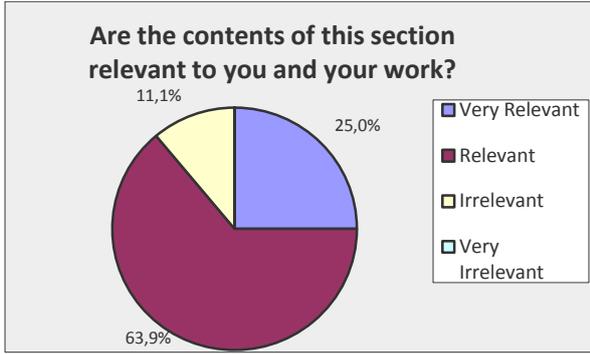
Following the questionnaire structure, please find below main outcomes about the full VETBA Pilot Testing: graphs and tables summarizing key outcomes have been developed per each module.

All surveys are available in the Excel document **VETBA Pilot Testing\_BAsResults**, directly exported from SurveyMonkey (Annex 2)

The report will end with a short paragraph underlining main outcomes and recommendations.



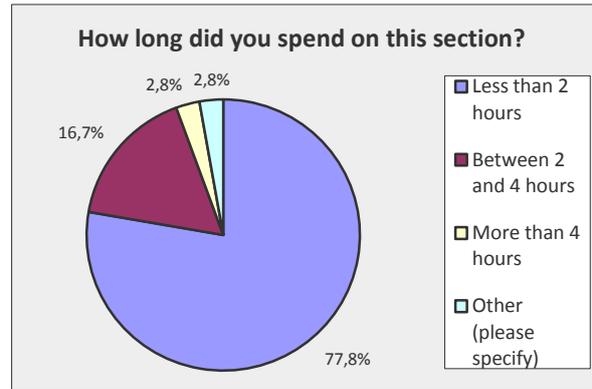
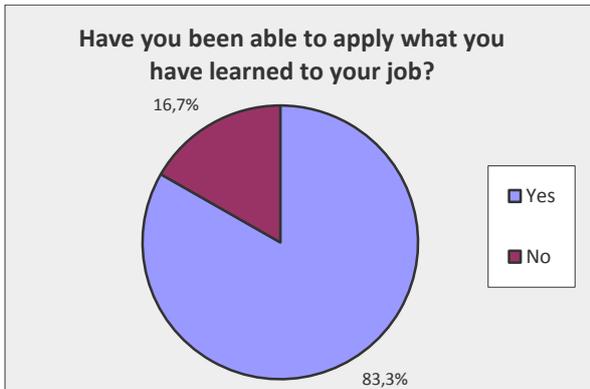
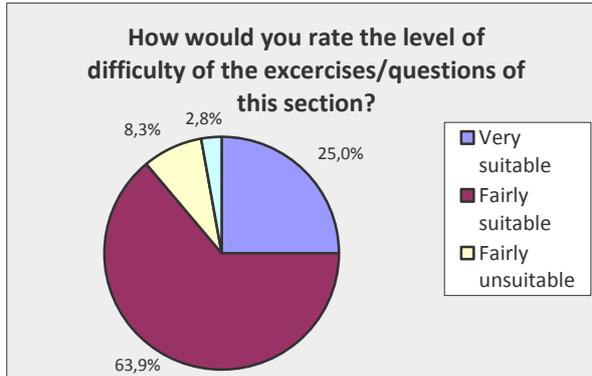
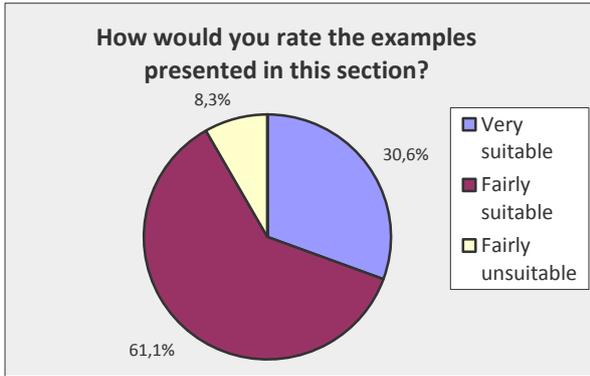
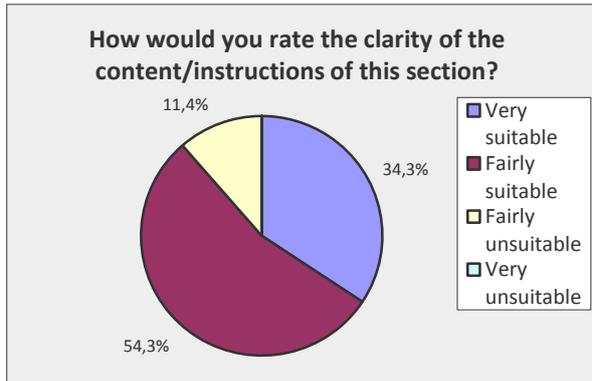
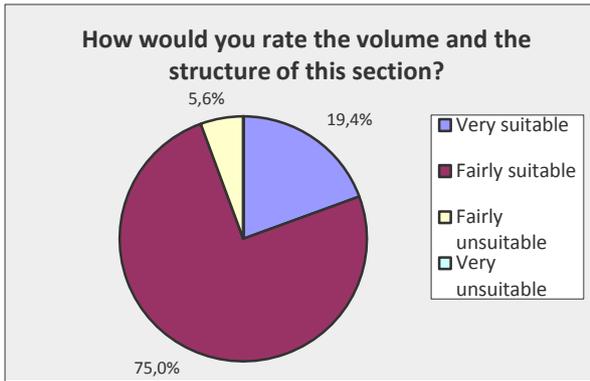
Learning Help Options (contents)



**MAIN COMMENTS ABOUT CONTENTS:**

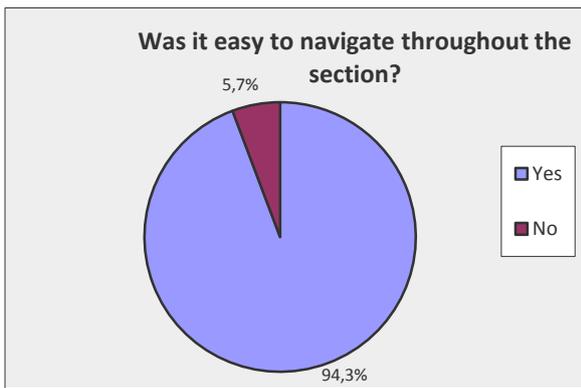
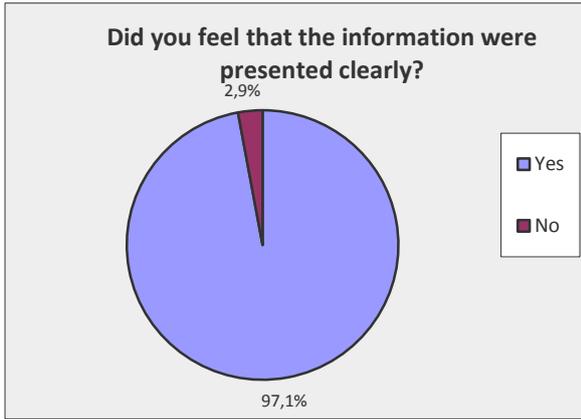
Overall positive comments have been expressed about the Learning Help Options section. Main critics are:

- Explanations were quite basic;
- More practical examples would have been appreciated;
- The section seems something apart from the rest of the e-learning course.





**Learning Help Options (format)**

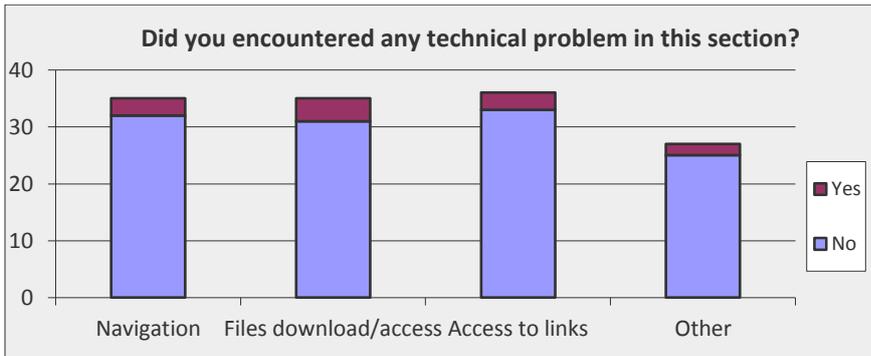


**MAIN COMMENTS ABOUT FORMAT:**

Overall positive comments have been expressed about the format.

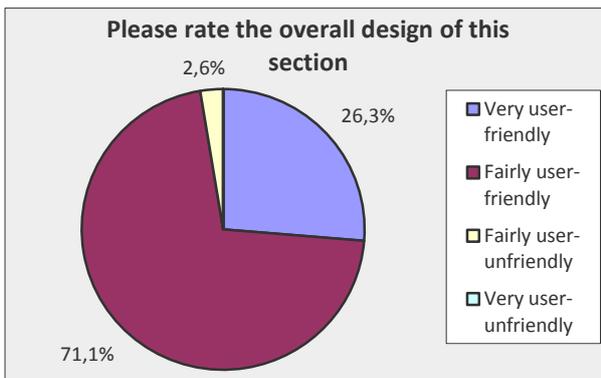
Main comments are:

- Would be useful to have a PDF to download and refer to offline;
- The formatting and visual presentation of the text can be improved;
- Every time you open an exercise, the computer loses the link to the presentation and therefore you have to open the presentation again from scratch and scroll to the place in the presentation where you were before opening the exercise;
- It is not possible to click on the Index, Contents and Bibliography tabs for faster scrolling or on a table of contents to navigate quickly to a specific section.



**MAIN TECHNICAL ISSUES:**

- The link on slide 12 on section 4 of business coaching module does not appear to work;
- Index, bibliography, and contents headings need to be inserted.

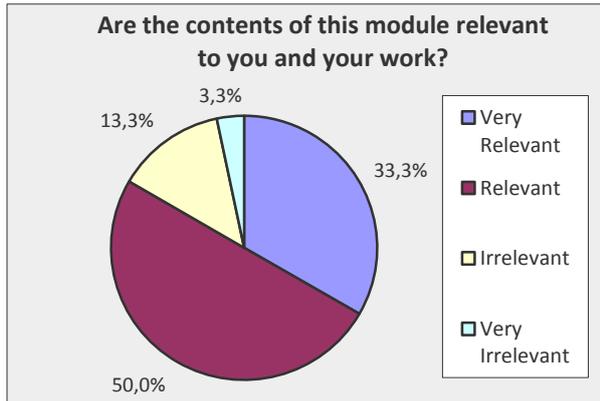


**MAIN COMMENTS ABOUT TECHNICAL QUALITY OF THIS SECTION:**

No major comments have been registered.



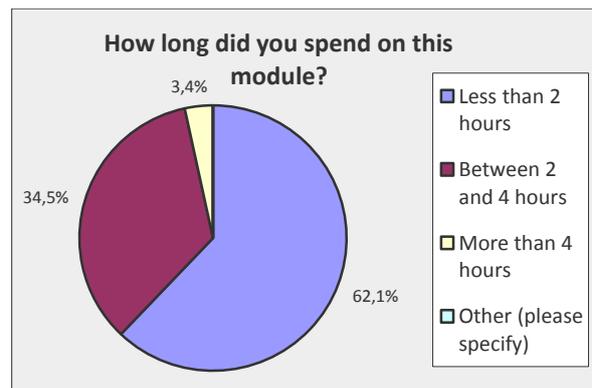
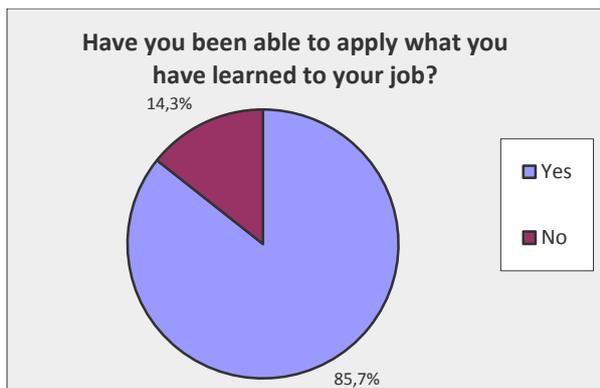
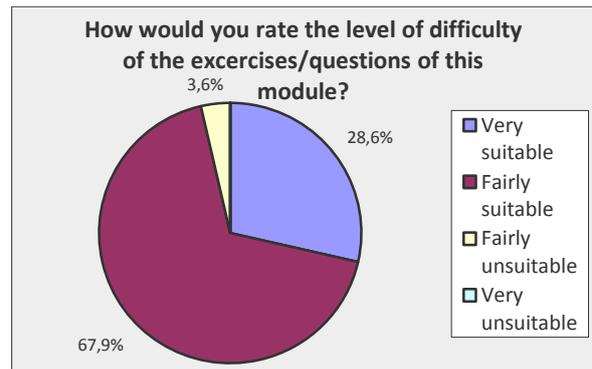
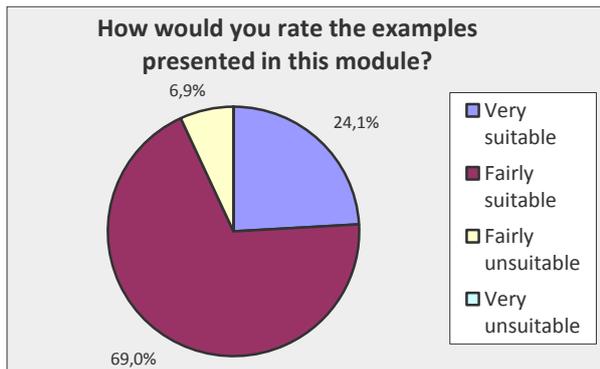
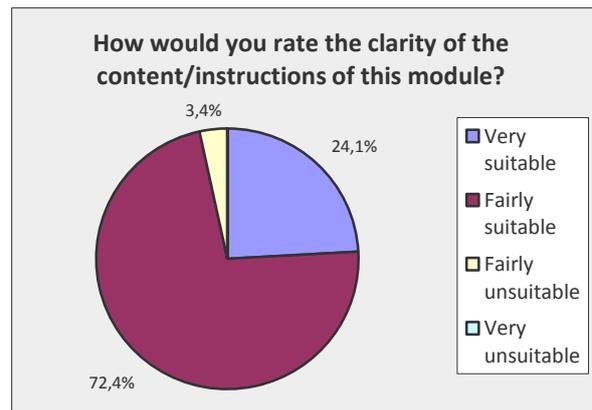
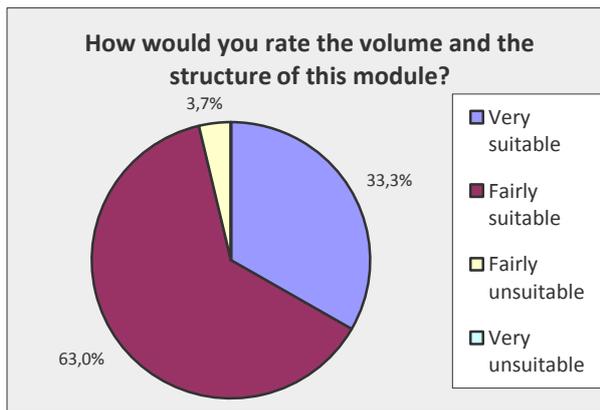
**How to Write a Case Study (contents)**



**MAIN COMMENTS ABOUT CONTENTS:**

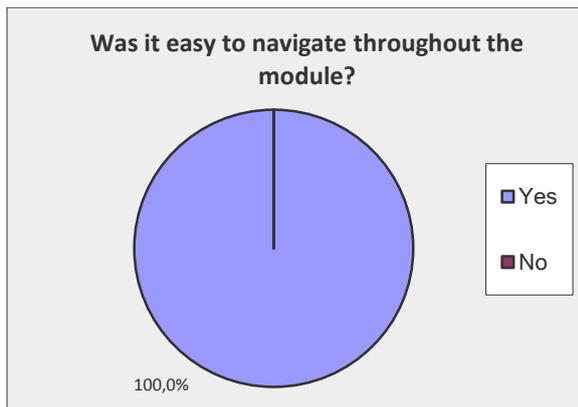
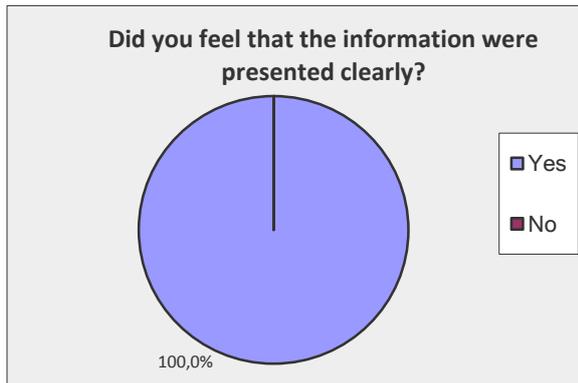
Overall, positive comments have been expressed about the *How to Write a Case Study* module.

- The topic is appreciated, being case studies very useful and transversal tools.
- Examples should be based on a real case study to emphasize the level of comprehension of the learner, thus avoiding the theoretical approaches.





**How to Write a Case Study (format)**

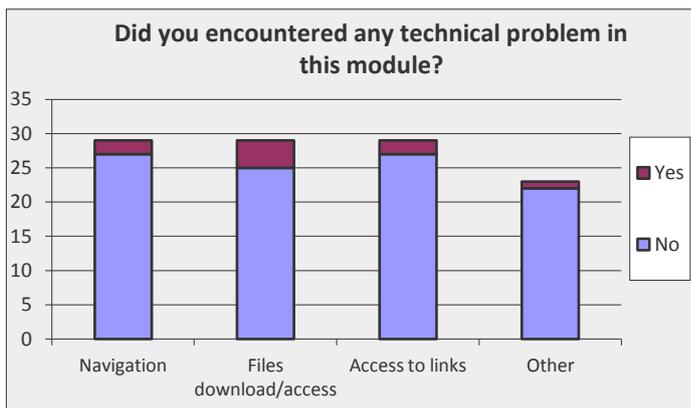


MAIN COMMENTS ABOUT FORMAT:

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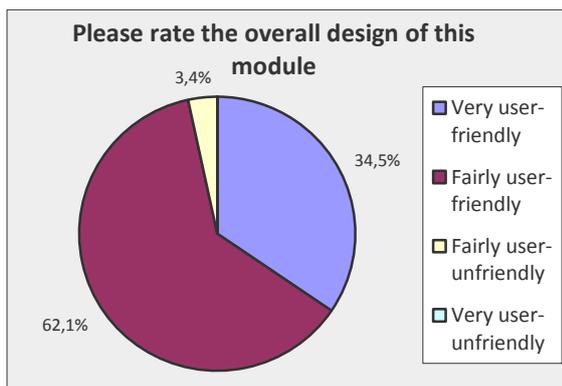
Main comments are:

- Role playing exercises were not relevant as e-learning are mostly undertaken on an individual basis.



MAIN TECHNICAL ISSUES:

- Slide 3 - links to TNA,DACUM should open in new windows;
- A single menu for all the learning modules and subtitles would be useful;
- It was useful to be able to download the modules in PDF.

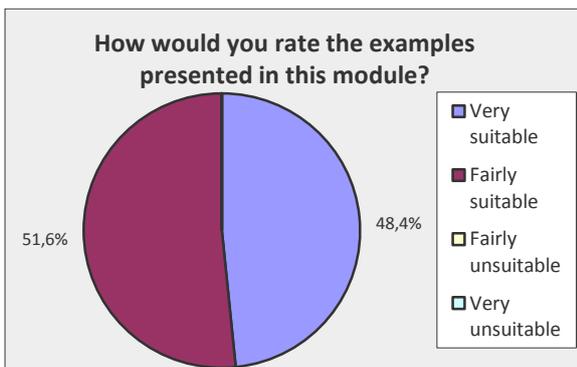
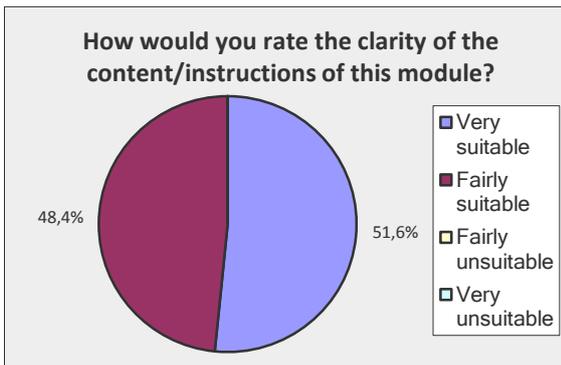
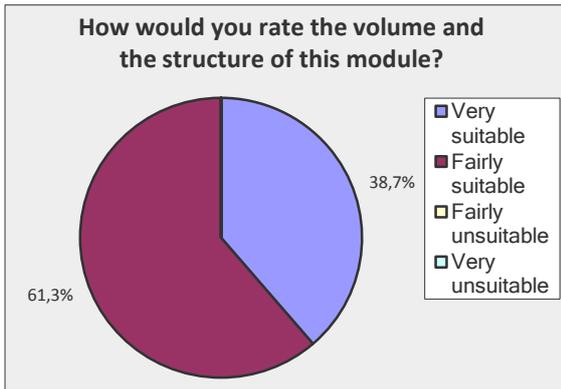
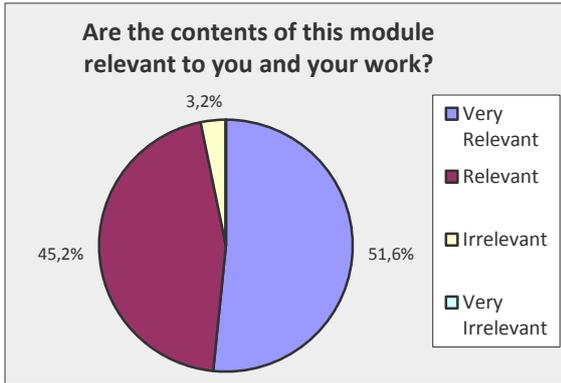


MAIN COMMENTS ABOUT TECHNICAL QUALITY OF THIS SECTION:

No major comments have been registered.



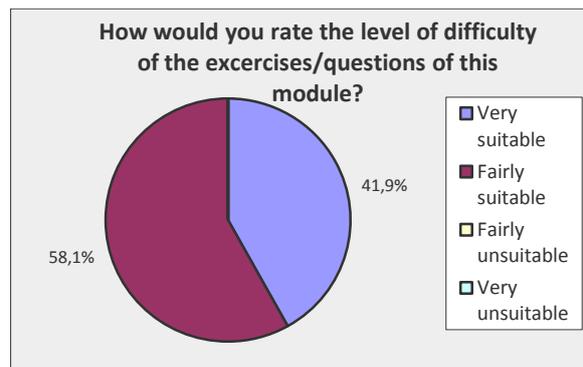
**Business Coaching (contents)**

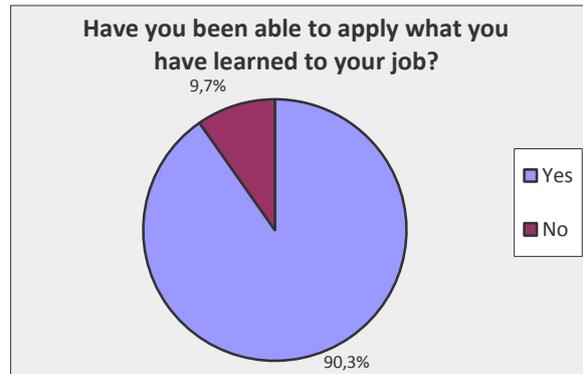
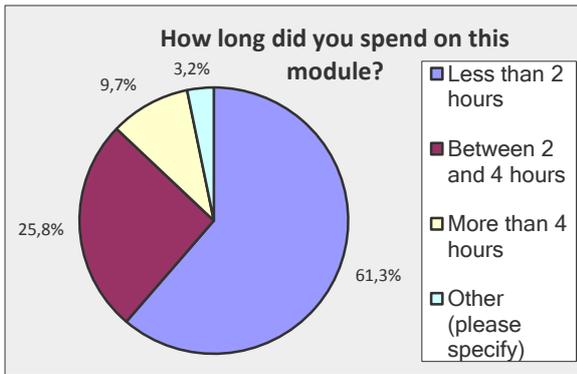


**MAIN COMMENTS ABOUT CONTENTS:**

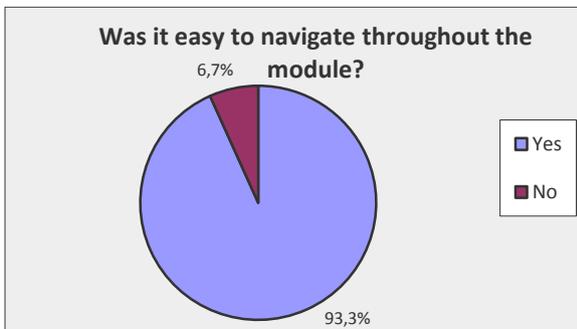
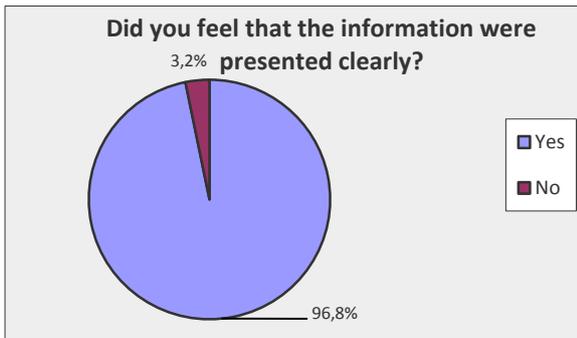
The topic has been appreciated, being a key service Business Advisors usually deal with. Main comments are:

- Exercise parts could include concrete/specific client problem, not only "open exercises" (participants may not know what problem/goal is suitable/right for such real situation).
- Concerning exercises main remark is about those exercises requiring more than 1 person. For ex. the very last one, where 3 participants are requested.
- At the outset, information on the background and standing of the "T-Grow Coaching Model" should be provided
- Index, Contents, and Bibliography tabs need to be completed.
- p14: word Weaknesses needs to be replaced by "Opportunities"
- p20: Techniques: this topic has not been separately addressed in the contents of the section
- p25: It would be clearer to add an exercise with a list of sample questions for which the reader has to indicated whether the questions are "good or bad" and why
- p30: why not simply add these questions as extra questions to the T-grow reflections sheet template?
- p36: sample engagement letter needs to be improved if this is to be used as a standard: for example, it is not clear how much time the coach will spend on the project and when the coach can send an invoice for the work performed. Clear outputs and parameters need to be defined
- p48: what are the best practice criteria? Give examples
- multiple typos throughout the presentation: p5, 21, 22, 24, 25, 31, 41,44, 49





**Business Coaching (format)**

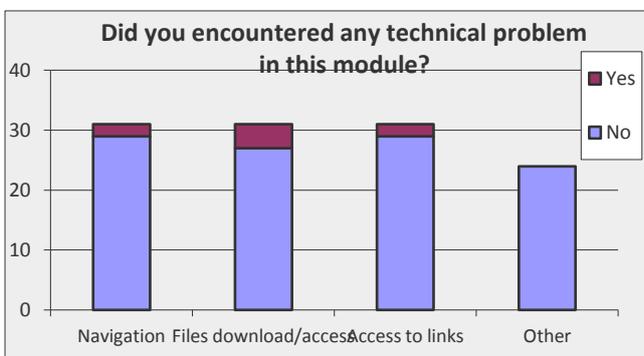


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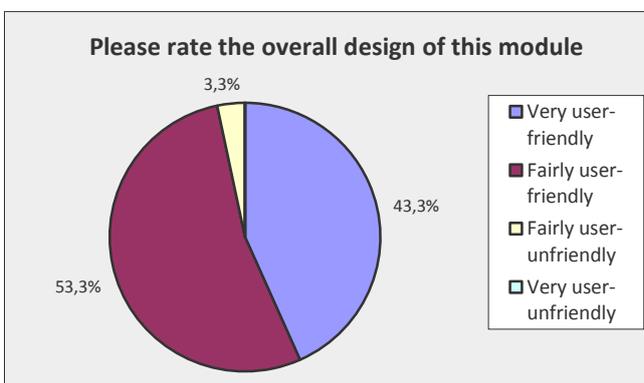
Main comments are:

- Index, Contents, and Bibliography tabs need to be completed.
- VETBA website has been found to be confusing in the links and presentation. A more simple menu with one-click to most content would be preferable.



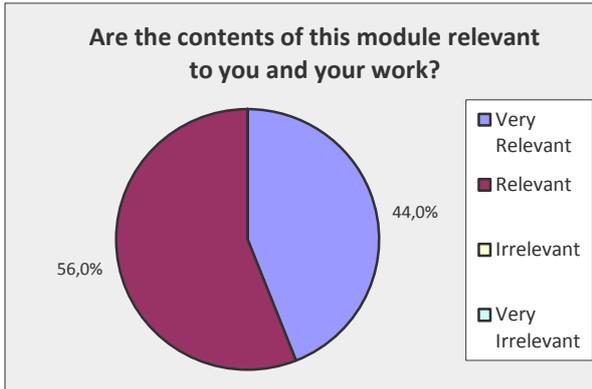
**MAIN TECHNICAL ISSUES:**

- Was not immediately clear that links initiated download - figured it out after a few attempts from then on no problem.
- Slide 12 on section 4 does not appear to work





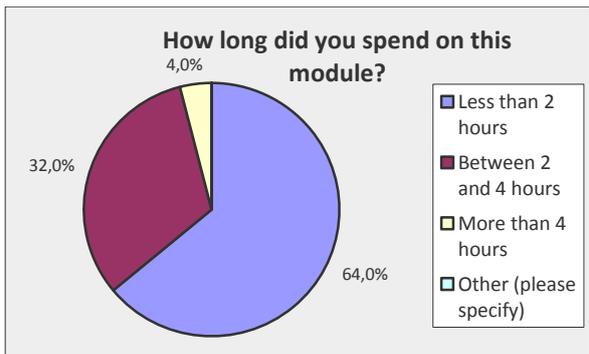
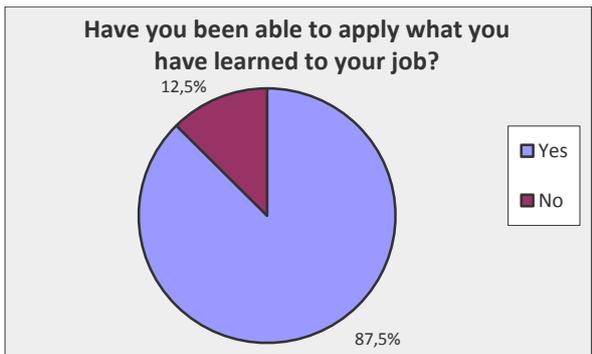
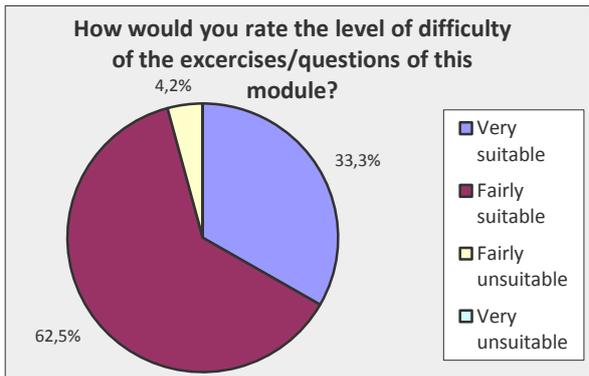
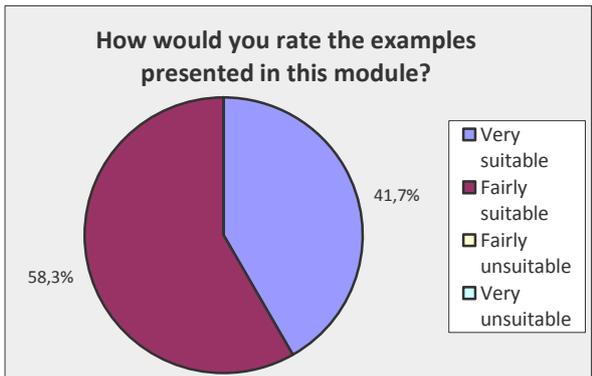
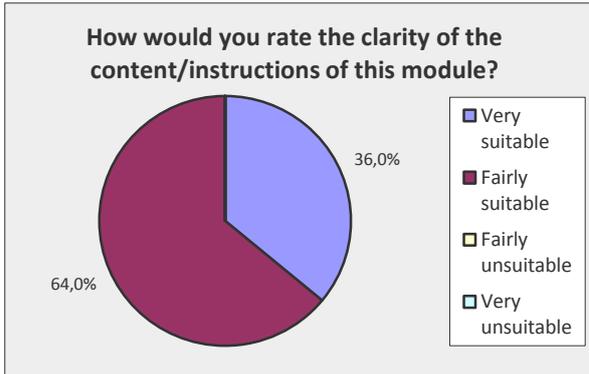
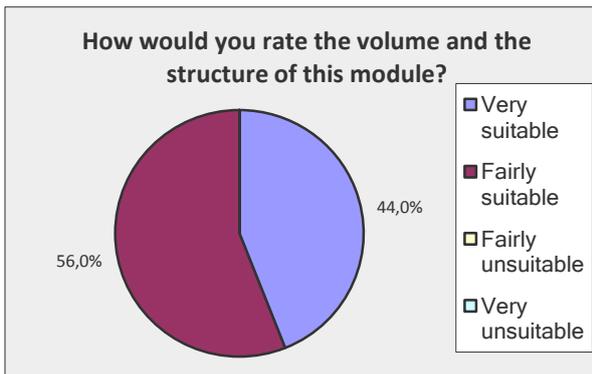
**Business Strategy (contents)**



**MAIN COMMENTS ABOUT CONTENTS:**

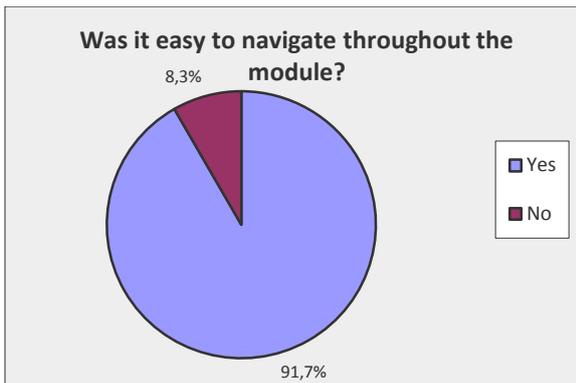
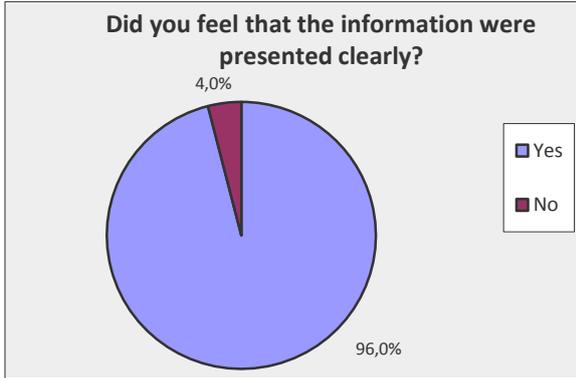
The topic has been appreciated. Main comments are:

- Knowledge useful to compare practice to theory, to systematize what already known and give professional titles and meanings to general knowledge ;
- Some sections are more theoretical and so less useful (like the European definition of SME's)
- More relevant examples should be made in terms of industry and "real-life".





**Business Strategy (format)**

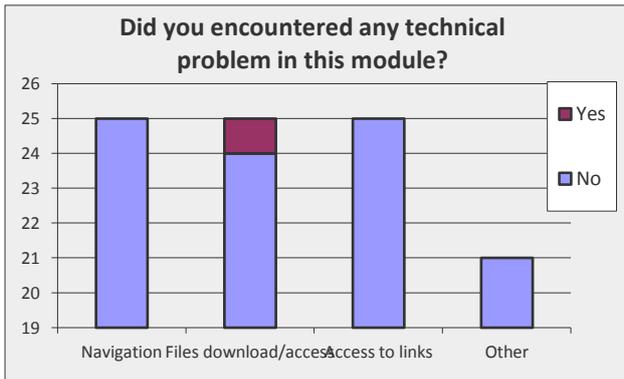


**MAIN COMMENTS ABOUT FORMAT:**

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Main comments are:

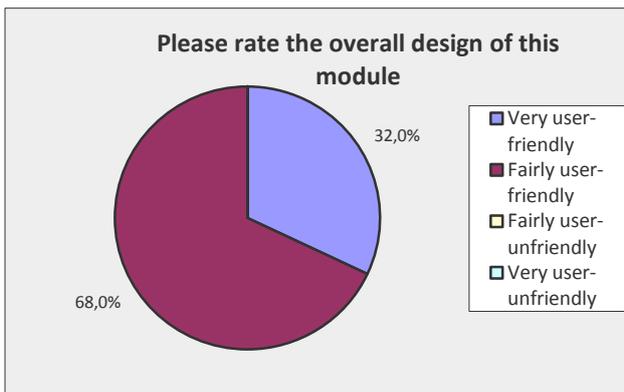
- Presentation of text can be improved;
- It's not clear how to go back to the Module menu;
- The home page of module should directly link to the 6 'sections';
- Users should be able to access any of the 6 sections at any given time - could include on contents or index tab;
- Also it may be easier if the last slide of each 'section' has link to next section or all 6 sections, instead of having to click back.



**MAIN TECHNICAL ISSUES:**

No major issues have been encountered.

- Maybe convert the MS Word links into PDF because not all users may have MS Word.

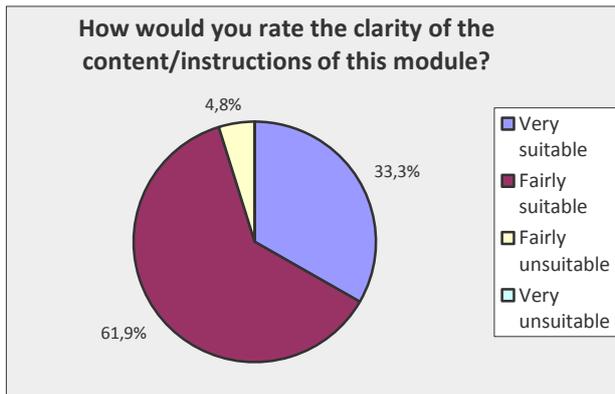
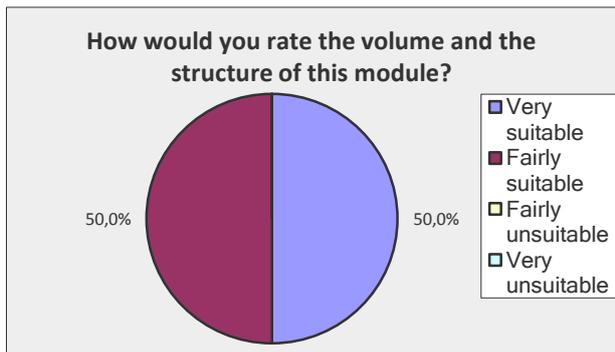
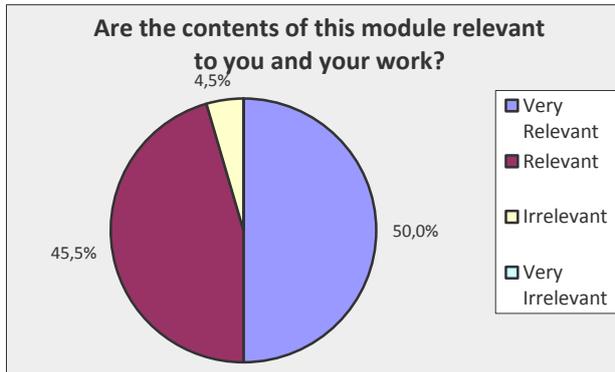


**MAIN COMMENTS ABOUT TECHNICAL QUALITY OF THIS SECTION:**

- There are a lot of information, and -even if they are well organized- for users at the very beginning could be difficult to move inside this module;
- Runs well even on Macintosh - what a change!



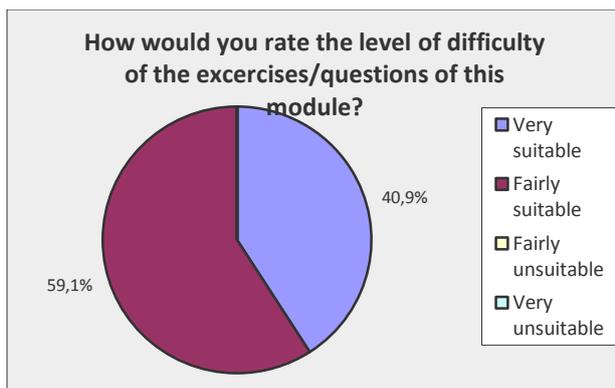
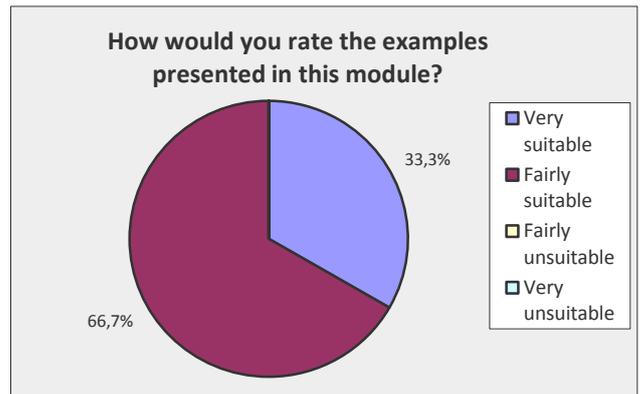
**Marketing (contents)**

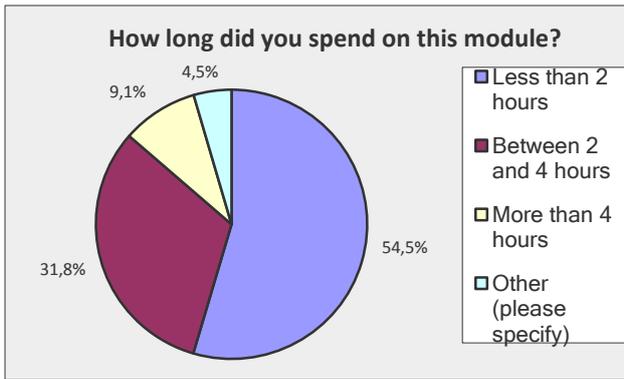


**MAIN COMMENTS ABOUT CONTENTS:**

The topic has been appreciated. Main comments are:

- Great temples !
- On introductory page, 'enabling objectives 1,2,3...' should be changed to actual objective;
- Discover the exact version of the book suggested was a dilemma. If it is necessary to use external resources, they should be explicitly stated and should not be paid;
- A few more practical examples and/or case studies would have helped;
- Is there any way to make the reading text available through a VETBA resource library of some kind?
- I found it very helpful that the content was kept brief and to the point without a lot of 'waffle'. This helped to reduce the number of pages on each subject and was appreciated.

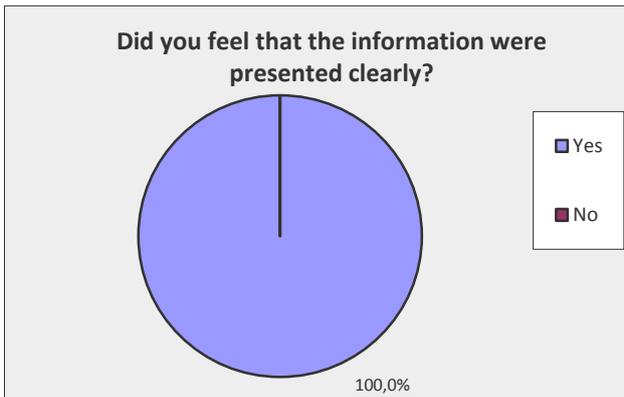




\*Other-One user specified the following:

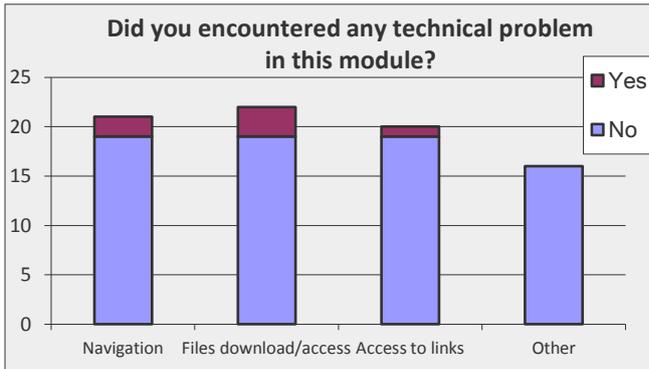
- In total over 9 hours with some exercises to be completed

**Marketing (format)**



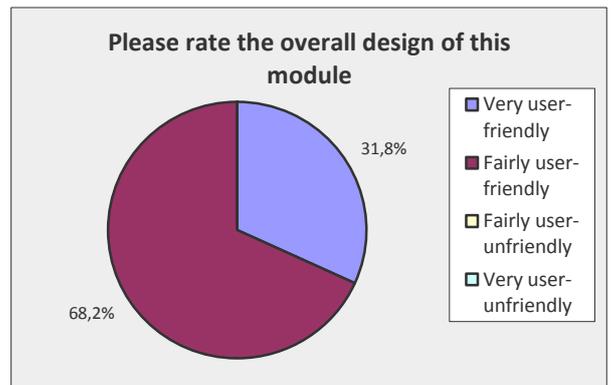
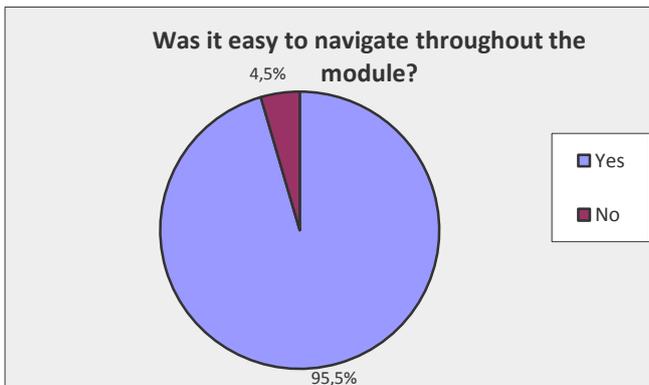
MAIN COMMENTS ABOUT FORMAT:

- Opening up a supplementary document, it opens in same window, and there is a tendency to close the window, which closes the e-learning course;
- The 5 steps should be in the main body of material: almost all the supplementary material could be included in the main body of the materials. This will make it longer, but if we reduce most of the references to objectives, then this will shorten it considerable.



MAIN TECHNICAL ISSUES:

- With Windows XP, when you open the client action plan word doc, the e-learning site closes. It doesn't do it on laptops running Vista.
- Couldn't get the '10 Golden Rules of Customers' hyperlink on page 16 of 30, under objective 2, to work.



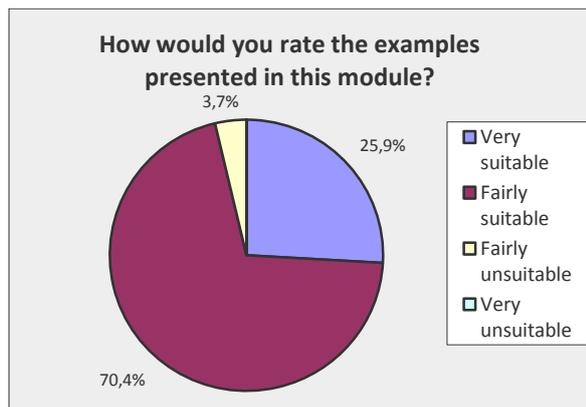
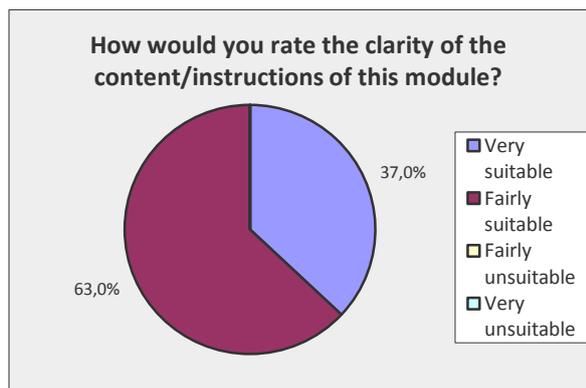
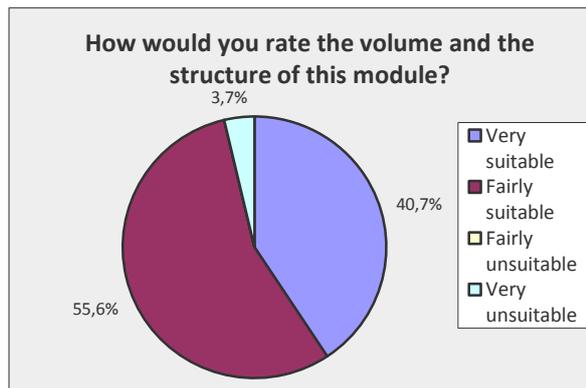
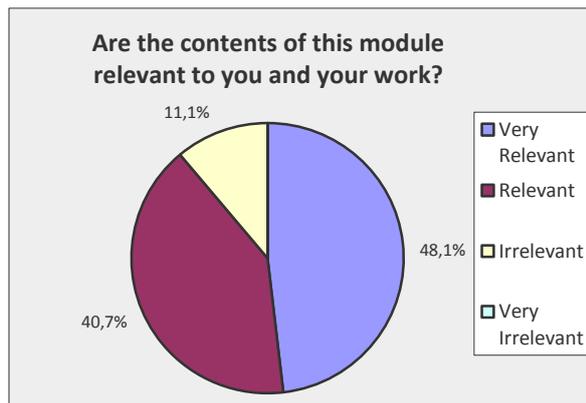


MAIN COMMENTS ABOUT TECHNICAL QUALITY OF THIS SECTION:

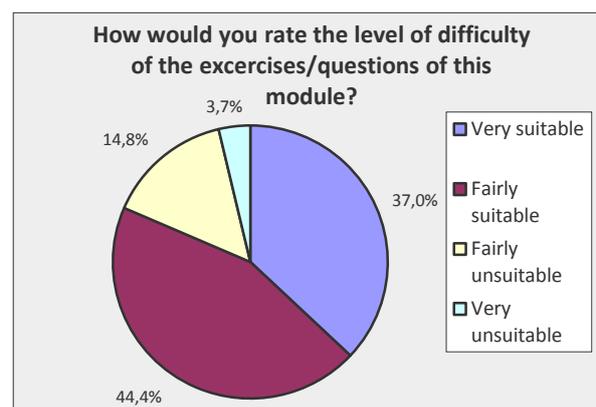
- The resources to be used shall be available easily and at no additional cost.
- Some docs came up as PDF, some as Word docs which seemed inconsistent. While the PDF's look better I think on the ground the Word docs would be of more use as they can be manipulated for working with clients.
- Could have done with more content in the 'Deliver Value' doc (5). Not as comprehensive as the 'Stay Close' doc (4) which gave more sample questions...I was struggling from the start to see/understand the difference between Step 3 Deliver and Step 5 Problem Solving and was hoping this section might make it clearer, but it didn't.
- Page 8 of 30 Marketing doc, line 5 beside picture of stairs take out 'by' after 'immediately'.
- Page 13 of 30, point 2 under Theory.. take out the word 'study'.
- Page 2 of Gain and Sustain Competitive Advantage (Doc 6), line 1, space in front of 'competitors' and should read 'need to be assessed'
- Page 16 of 30 says 'pay particular attention to the three areas being reviewed:' but only two are listed below this?
- Marketing Mix doc, paragraph 2, line 3 should read 'you pour out in the bowl'
- Page 17 of 30: when you use the 'here' hyperlink the screen that comes up has a box across the centre blocking out some text....think it is to do with having to subscribe to this site but it looks bad. Even if the box had some text saying you should subscribe or something it would help but that might be to do with the site and not VETBA.
- Page 22 of 30, beside! image should read 'Remember your task includes the evaluation of what is currently being done'
- Page 27 of 30 under Tasks 1 should be 'An initial step' not 'A'
- Other possible links that might be of interest and have useful content could include: [www.gemconsortium.org](http://www.gemconsortium.org); [www.smallbusinesscan.ie](http://www.smallbusinesscan.ie) (particular to Ireland ?)also a link to info on franchising from the 'Distribution Strategy' doc e.g. [www.irishfranchisemagazine.net](http://www.irishfranchisemagazine.net)
- It would be of extreme help if the overall site could incorporate some kind of 'forum' or 'Q&A' type section so Enterprise Workers could link in with their colleagues and seek guidance on issues that they are encountered. This could then help produce a FAQ section with real, on the ground guidance.

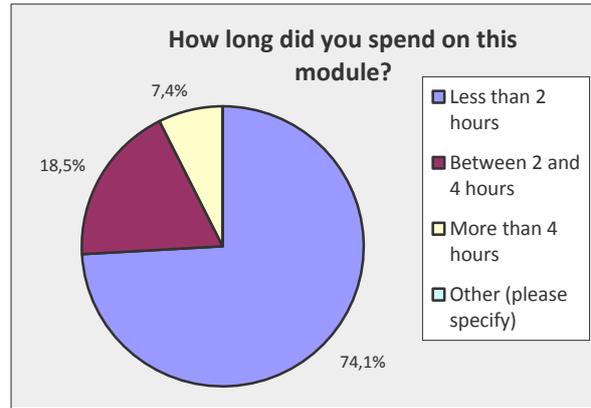
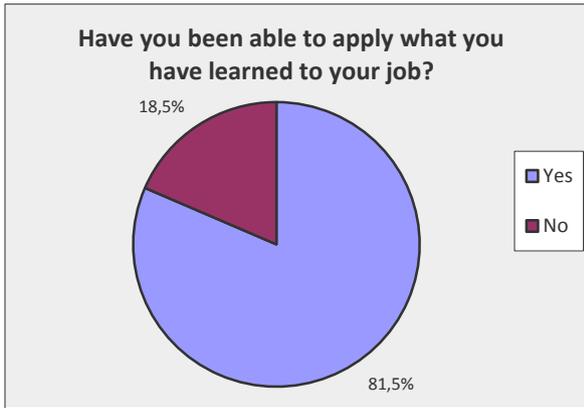


**Finance (contents)**

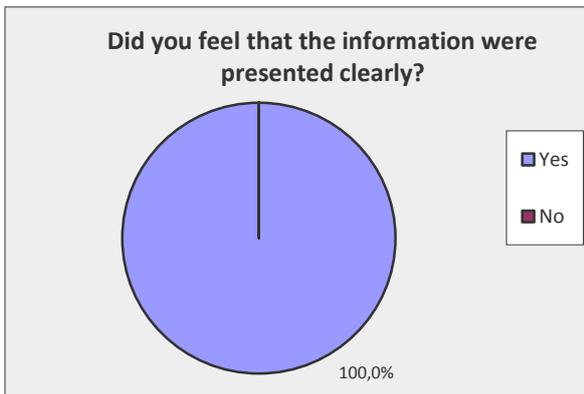


- MAIN COMMENTS ABOUT CONTENTS:**
- Information are useful mainly for those who don't have a strong financial background. A great introduction, but could do with the addition of some more advanced ratios as an advanced module;
  - Also requires a service example (i.e. the fish example has raw materials, but a lot of our clients are pure services;
  - Would be useful to highlight common errors;
  - It is not clear how the references can be used. Where can the manuals be found?
  - It would be useful to add a solution module for the exercises;
  - I do not see how this module has been structured according to the Benjamin Bloom model as explained in the Learning Help Options module;
  - Multiple spelling errors;
  - p5: Balance sheet is the term that is commonly used in the business world, not Statement of Financial Position;
  - p8: Why multiply by 100%? It is confusing and not necessary;
  - p8: Why not add an example with the ROCE calculation for the Joe Fish financials?
  - p16: need to explain Peak Borrowing Requirement, Cash flow statement, return on investment, repayment of interest cover re borrowings + add an example in a table
  - p17: Rates = Interest rates?

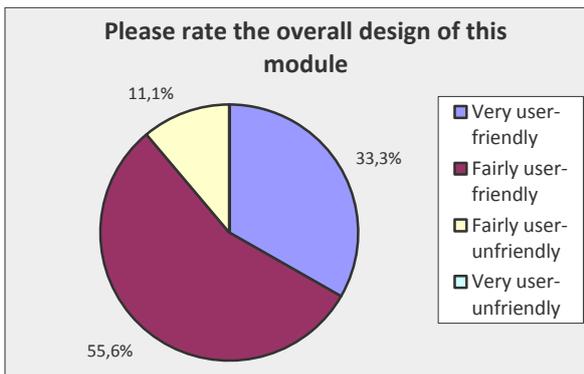
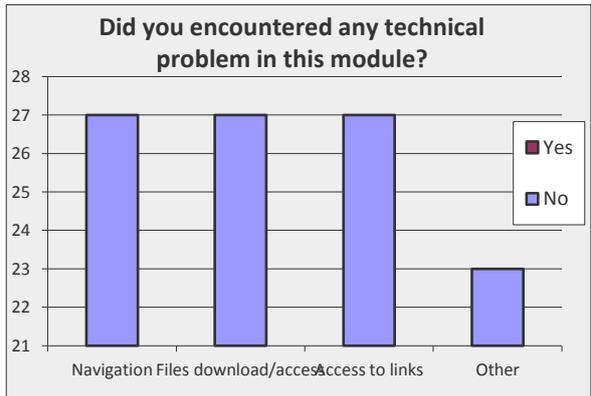
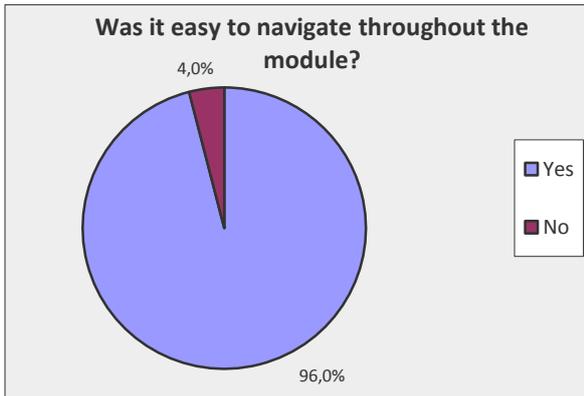




**Finance (format)**

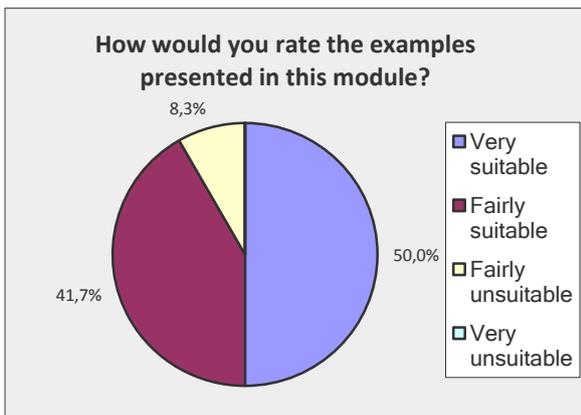
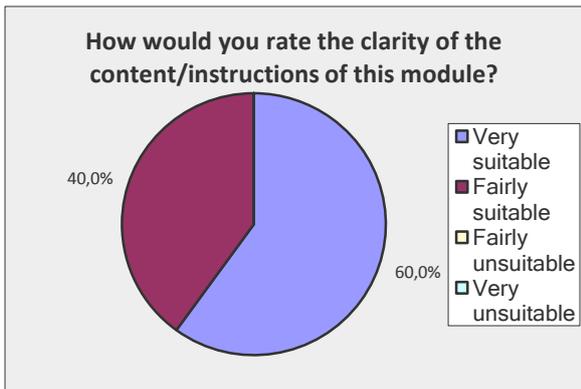
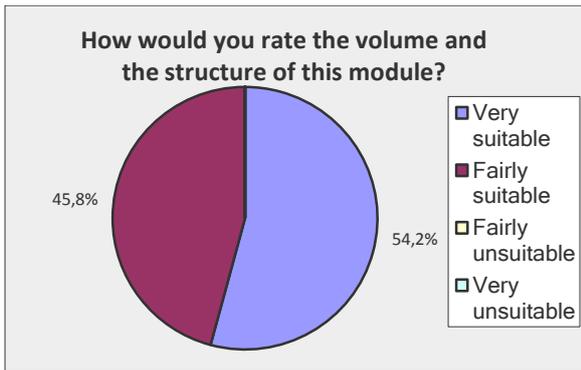
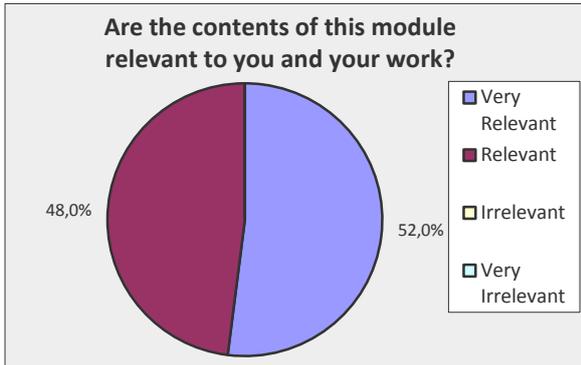


- MAIN COMMENTS ABOUT FORMAT:**
- There are some grammatical errors and typos in the module;
  - Concerning Navigation, you can only scroll up and down;
  - Mac friendly.





**Business Planning (contents)**

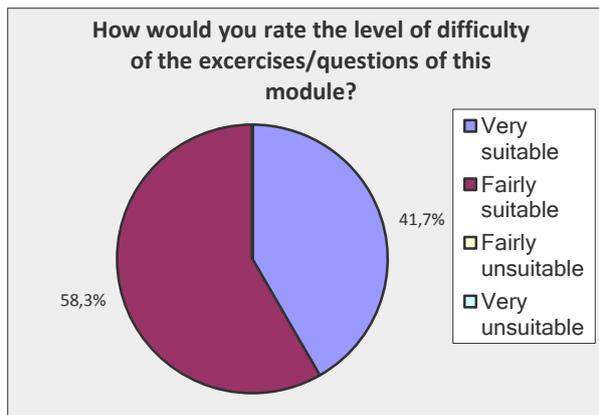


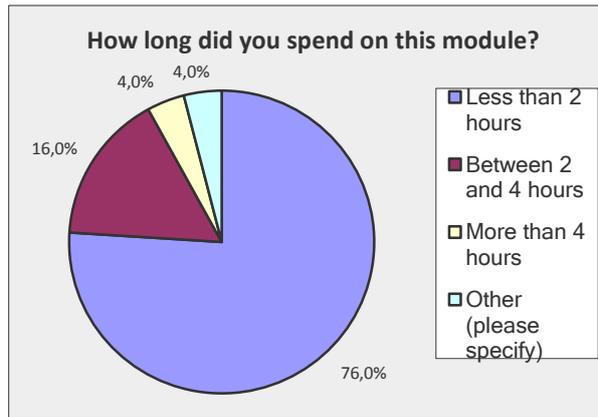
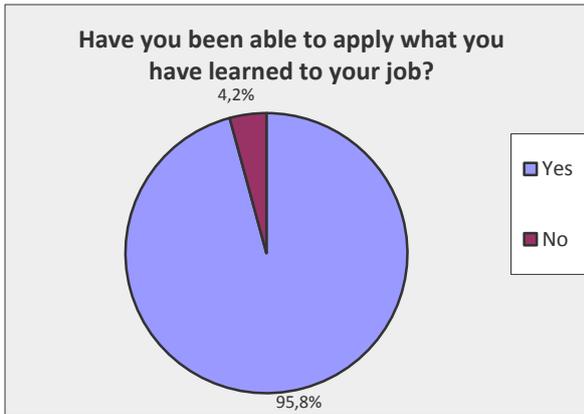
**MAIN COMMENTS ABOUT CONTENTS:**

Contents have been appreciated; module is considered as a good summary of the methods to use.

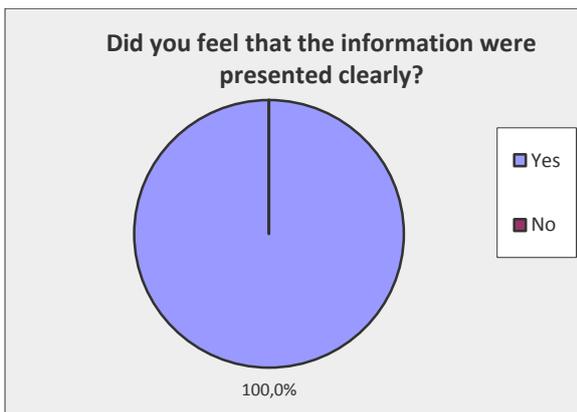
Main comments are reported below:

- Light, user friendly, straight to the point: very useful tool!
- Clear, short, transferable, practical ;
- It's not very interactive, its more designed to function as a check list than actual training modules, but a good guide and useful tool;
- A case study with numerical examples would be useful because what clients need is help to make their business plan from the beginning and good and bad concrete examples are a very good way to teach the clients;
- Used it to review a client's business plan, helped me spot a few omissions from his plan
- The 'Venture Economics' section should be reworded to 'key metrics' or 'key performance indicators' perhaps - I don't feel the term 'venture economics' is in common use out there amongst business advisors.



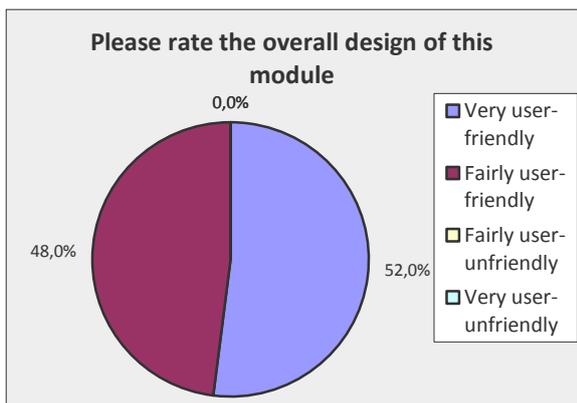
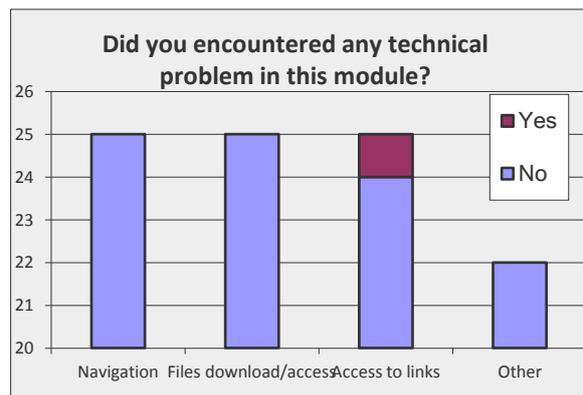
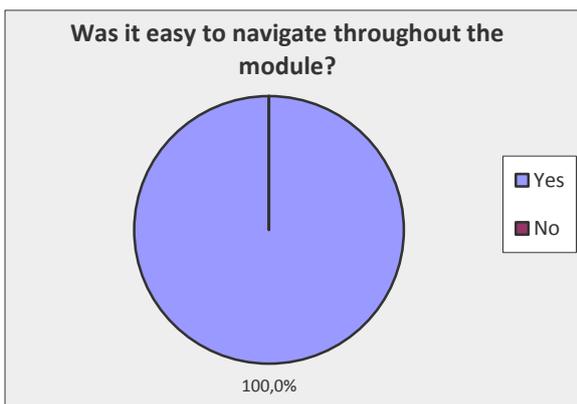


**Business Planning (format)**



MAIN COMMENTS ABOUT FORMAT:

- Bit too much in there in terms of the business plan checklist - I'd need a shorter checklist & one with boxes that I could download and use again & again would be more helpful than bullet points.





## Global Considerations

### BAs' opinion on VETBA e-learning course:

- Useful; maybe somewhat too basic. Probably more suitable for those who are just entering the business support world.
- It's very useful. A lot of suitable examples.
- Very useful.
- IT IS AN USEFUL TRAINING FOR MY JOB.
- Very good.
- Useful in my work.
- Very useful.
- Good, clear and concise.
- Very useful.
- Very good.
- Very useful.
- Good. Didn't fully check to see if you could communicate with others undertaking course at same time.
- Very good.
- I think it's a very good tool, especially for less experienced BAs
- (Coaching) - Very useful and comprehensible particularly for beginner coaches. Good quality of the course layout, easy to access.
- A very worthwhile learning tool which fits my schedule and is flexible
- I've made the modules, how to write a case study and Marketing, and it seemed to be very well structured and easy to interpret and understand.
- Should improve external resources.
- Great idea, well presented, clear.
- It's a user-friendly course.
- Useful tool to develop some skills
- It's a great course with useful contents!
- Good.
- - Business Coaching module: OK
- - Finance module: very low quality
- Completed the Marketing Module and it was very informative and would have real world application.
- I particularly appreciate the practical side of the course
- Would recommend it.
- Very good. The finance module would be very useful for entry level financial business advisors and also as general guidance for all round advisors.
- Very good, and relevant to our needs.
- Excellent.
- An excellent resource.
- A very useful tool to develop some skills.
- Interesting and multi-module, a very useful for work.
- User-friendly and good global overview of what a business is and implies.
- Comprehensive notes and well-structured web site which is very user friendly.
- Useful and organised into relevant and detailed modules.
- Very interesting

### VETBA added values in BAs opinion

- Clarity.
- Really good examples and exercises.



- Great idea, particularly for those who work alone. E-learning is a key learning tool, allowing anyone to upskill no matter where they are located
- Clarity.
- Encourage European BA's to work together.
- Focus on any of these core modules including finance, marketing business coaching and planning are all very relevant for SMEs.
- You can find all main info in one course, even if not too detailed it helps with good tips and practical tools. I find it particularly useful for young, less experienced BAs.
- A lot of links to the web pages connected with the subject - for me very useful, especially if somebody looks for more information.
- Real, ready to use templates of documents on each stage.
- Some real time tutorials and web based workshops and exchanges would add value.
- The course modules cover topics with which we are confronted on a daily basis but for which I had no basic training.
- Refresher value.
- Yes, I really like the marketing and financial contents.
- Reinforced knowledge.
- Develop the skills and competences of Business Advisors.
- Good contents.
- It could add value by providing a common knowledge framework for the consultants we work with, but I feel that the course is too basic to add much value as it stands.
- The fact it can be done at times that are convenient to the learner.
- It will be interesting, if we want to use it with a client, to add some visuals in order to facilitate the comprehension of some concepts.
- The business plan check list was good
- 1. Confirmed existing knowledge; 2. Reinforced knowledge; 3. Addressed areas of knowledge that benefited from development; 4. Could undertake at own place
- Personal development.
- Integrate in a multi-site modular, transparent easy form of modules.
- Good summary.
- It helps me to stand back and reflect on many of my current practices to bring a more rigorous didactic methodology to what I do.

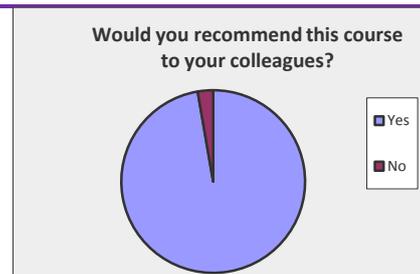
### **Main difficulties encountered by BAs:**

- It was in English.
- I found the VETBA website to be confusing in the links and presentation of the whole course. A more simple menu with one-click to most content would be preferable.
- Nothing major, the navigation could be a better more user friendly.
- I think its strength is also its weakness: it's too light. So if you look for a full course, you could be disappointed.
- None, except the navigation from the links to the documents - I have mentioned in the main questionnaire.
- Getting the time to follow through on some of the materials and links.
- The main difficulties were the technical terms. Although considering I have a good level of English, some technical terms I had to search in a dictionary, which meant that it takes much longer to realize it, i.e. Marketing module.
- Time to achieve all the modules.
- Not interactive, no solutions provided for the exercises
- No real difficulties however an indication of the time each module might take could be useful...so the learning can be planned better etc.
- Occasionally it's difficult to navigate & work out where you are in the course
- Size of font - a little small at times
- Learning course are in English and it was a little bit difficult because is my second language
- A small frustration with navigating from the site to the actual content (would have preferred a more simple menu structure) but this is minor.
- Downloads.



**97% of BAs would recommend VETBA training course**

- To get more information about fields of interest for them.
- You always pick up something new. I would also recommend the bibliography - very useful references.
- If it was accredited it would be good from a point of CPD.
- Some interesting content in relation to business coaching and marketing - always good to apply real life case studies to practical day to day business issues.
- It is very good, quick and cheap way to learn about coaching. There are the most important, useful content-related information. Very clearly and comprehensible presented.
- I recommend it to colleagues who, like me, work directly with customers or have to manage small Business companies and have no training in business management, marketing, etc.
- It's a good way to keep update.
- It's a great opportunity to remember and learn new contents!
- Easy to use easy to learn, and understanding language.
- Too basic. I have the feeling that the course has been written by someone with theoretical knowledge but not much practical experience in these domains.
- Very to the point. Could be applied to our work with clients.
- Because of its clarity and its user-friendliness; it is a perfect summary of all recognized methods in business planning
- I have already emailed it to some colleagues to incorporate in their own development & training delivery.
- interesting and multi-module, easy form of modules.
- It depends the background of people but it's a good review for many people involved in SME's coaching.
- Depending on the colleagues as the content is not very complex.



**Suggested topics for the future development of VETBA project**

- Business modeling
- More financial ratios, more exercises with cash flow, budget etc.
- The finance section could be strengthened - a little basic for me. Social Media could be strengthened as a section in Marketing also.
- Links to real videos from the coaching sessions may be useful. You can also add additional course/module for the existing coaches with the experience, because this is from my point of view rather for beginners.
- Communication and people skills are critical and can be expanded
- I would like to examine further issues related to the internationalization process of SMEs in global environments.
- The financial ratios & examples of different types of businesses other than fish reselling - e.g. the pure services model, the ecommerce model, the software development model (to show how R&D and intellectual property are dealt with in the accounts & in projections in particular).
- Finance module needs improvement
- A forum where Enterprise Workers can interact and seek guidance on issues they face would be very informative. Also perhaps a little more on technology in business development? Felt the module I covered, Marketing, needed a bit more reference to the use of internet marketing, SEO etc etc as well as links to possible sources of information on the web re market research.
- Finance could be deepened with further examples.
- Something on the different "niches" of entrepreneurship training eg immigrants, older people, younger people, women etc.
- Succession Planning. New media & its role/influence in business.
- Selling the benefits of business development.
- A negotiation course.
- Finance Module.



### Eventual benefit from an official certification

- Depends on what you want Certification for however - job seeking or ?
- Any type of certification would help to endorse the learnings on this course and perhaps act as a motivator to encourage people to use it more.
- Certification will confirm good quality of it, so will be better, more professionally perceived by the receivers.
- Certification can act as a quality control measure and also indicate that people have reached a defined standard in their knowledge required for their job.
- For me there is no need because I know how my knowledge was obtained. But an official recognition, through a certificate or a diploma, facilitates the recognition of external entities, including other companies or prospective employers.
- When we send people on for training we always try to ensure it has an official Certification. This is even more important if we are 'training' others. It would also give a standard for entrants into this work in Europe i.e. clients will know to ask if their Enterprise Worker has 'X' Certificate as a way to ensure quality.
- It is a very good tool for BIC.
- In order to get individuals to commit to the project it would be useful to have an accreditation/ certificate.
- I am a Certified Management Consultant and it would add to my CPD. It would allow clients to differentiate between consultants/advisers.
- Is always better to get confirmation of the training.
- When investing so much time in learning and self-improvement it is always motivating to gain a recognized award as an outcome.

Do you think the project would benefit from an official Certification?



■ Yes  
■ No

### Additional comments

- Well done on a great initiative.
- I like the course and thank you I could tested it.
- Well done.
- A very good project with great information and a source of reference
- Please ensure that offerings remain Mac-friendly.
- The Marketing Module I covered was very enjoyable.
- Didn't find the Learning help options module quite as good (see comments in relevant section.)
- This project is a great idea and should lead on to an industry standard for those working in the field (at least in Europe) along with providing an ongoing resource to ensure continued learning. Thank You.

### **Main Conclusions & Recommendations**

Considering all the above, we can now stress main outcomes resulting from the Pilot Testing of the full VETBA e-learning course.

The overall impression about VETBA modules is positive, all modules have been appreciated for their **clarity, accessibility and conciseness**: it's a useful toolbox for Business Advisors, especially for less experienced ones.

Indeed, one of the most recurrent comments concerns the fact that the course is **a bit too basic in some points** (i.e. Learning Help Options, Finance module).

Another major comment, regards **exercises and examples**: these should be **more practical** and should respond to daily problems Business Advisors usually face, avoiding theoretical approaches.

Particularly on exercises, **role playing exercises** are not considered that relevant as e-learning are mostly undertaken on an individual basis. By contrast would be useful that all Business Advisors work on the same problems, so people can compare how others have managed the problems; for this purpose a "forum" or 'Q&A' type section has been suggested. Furthermore, it would be useful to add **exercise solutions** in a separate doc.

Another comment concerns the **resources** supporting the contents developed in each module: some testers asked for more on line and for free resources. This aspect should be taken into account in the "translation" phase, checking if these resources are available in other languages.

An interesting suggestion is to add a **list/inks of all templates** (for all modules) in a separate tab.

No major issues have been noted on VETBA website.