

COUNTRY PILOT REPORT 2013

Summary of Pilot Results in Bulgaria, Turkey and Italy



I. Executive Summary

This report provides a summary of the pilot phase of the BEQUAL tool in three countries: Bulgaria, Italy and Turkey. It includes overview of the purposes of this phase, the local context in which it was carried out, preparation and planning of the phase, results and evaluation, as well as feedbacks from the participants and recommendations and identified needs for improvement.

II. Preparation and purposes of the pilot phase

Purposes:

- To test the application and the technical performance of the adapted benchmarking tool in Bulgaria, Turkey and Italy;
- To receive feedback from the users in order to acknowledge potential problems and/or errors;
- To identify and evaluate potential errors and gaps, as well as areas for improvement;
- To define proposals for improvement of the benchmarking tool and the manual for VET providers in order to be most relevant to the needs/requirements of the local VET providers;
- To determine the short term impact of each of the results and/or products, with the aim of taking necessary corrective actions;
- To check the relevance and the attitude/acceptance of the benchmarking tool among different types of VET providers in order to identify the long-term potential of the tool;
- To test the accuracy and the efficiency of the benchmarking questionnaires;
- To define the valorization framework.

Preparation

The preparatory phase of the pilot in the researched countries included:

- translation of the questionnaires in the local languages;
- selection of dates and location of seminars;
- selection of organizations - VET providers;
- distribution of official invitations;
- familiarization with the benchmarking tool and applications;
- preparation of list of participants and agendas;
- preparation of information materials and presentations;
- the preparatory phase in Turkey also included brain-storming meeting among partners for discussing the main issues.

Local contexts:

Although certain steps have been taken towards introduction of quality assurance in VET, QA is still not recognized as an issue of major importance for the Bulgarian VET providers. In Bulgaria there is no evidence of any consistent effort for introducing similar tool, aimed at benchmarking VET providers' performance in quality assurance. In Turkey on the other hand, there are many institutions/organizations that are familiar with Quality Assurance in Vocational Education and Training. However, most of the VET providers in the three countries have no experience in using benchmarking tools related to QA in VET, such as BEQUAL. This is identified as one of the premises for the successful utilization of the BEQUAL tool.

Issues/Constraints

During the preparatory phase in Bulgaria, small errors in translation were reported but they were timely corrected. In Italy, however, there were certain constraints, due to the small number of VET providers in the region of Empoli and the busy schedule of the managers of these institutions. Many of the contacted organizations were not easy to convince to participate in the pilot phase and implement the questionnaires. This explains the small number of organizations that participated in the benchmarking. The implementation of the benchmarking tool in Turkey was partially impeded by the unwillingness of most of the participants to identify specific organizational problems. Another obstacle presented the reluctance of participants to answer open-ended questions.

During the preparatory phase no other significant problems were encountered.

III. Methodology

Design of the pilot

The partner organizations in the three countries have taken different approaches in the methodology for implementing the benchmarking tool.

In Turkey, after the preparatory phase, a face to face meeting and two workshops were organized during which the project was introduced and information about the process was given to the participants. These workshops were held between April 1 and April 16 2013 in the computer room of Sisli Conference Hall for the purpose of filling out the questionnaires online. After the submission of the questionnaires the participants completed the evaluation forms both online (in



English) and paper based (in Turkish). Subsequently, all paper based questionnaires were translated by METGEM.

Three pilot seminars were held in three different locations in Bulgaria. The pilot events were organized in three major cities (Plovdiv, Pleven, and Sofia) between 15 February and 07 March 2013 in order to allow a wider range of regional VET providers to participate. In order to facilitate a large number of participants to test the BEQUAL tool online, NAVET and IWG selected computer labs of VET schools and centers for the event's venue: Plovdiv School of Mathematics, The Bulgarian-German VET Center (Pleven), Sofia Vocational High School of Electronics "John Atanasoff". The events included short presentations of BEQUAL project and portal, and the quality assurance process in vocational education and training, and the EQAVET system as well. Also detailed information about the benchmarking tool and instructions for completing it were presented to the participants. Further explanations about the evaluation scale and the possible interpretations of the results and the statistics were given to the attendants. NAVET and IWG teams offered technical support and guidance to the participants while they were testing the functionalities of the benchmarking tool. Afterwards the participants were involved in discussion about the benchmarking experience and were encouraged to make recommendation about the process which provided a good basis for assessment of BEQUAL benchmarking tool's potential and the risks implied in the Bulgarian VET environment.

In Italy many of the VET providers are geographically dispersed which made it difficult to arrange gatherings of the representatives of the organizations at seminars and workshops. Many of the contacted representatives were not able to rearrange their schedules which rendered impossible the organization of seminars and workshops. ASEV took this into consideration and decided to organize individual meetings with representatives of VET centers and vocational schools. Between January 25 and March 25 2013, ASEV managed to arrange 15 individual meetings for introduction to the project, the BEQUAL tool and instructions, and one vocational center was contacted through phone and mail. The meetings were held in different cities (Empoli, Florence, Pontedera, Pistoia, Livorno, Bagno a Ripoli, Prato, Colle di Val'Elsa and Genoa), at VET provider's premises and in ASEV's quarters, as well. At the meetings paper and electronic versions of Benchmarking tool and Questionnaire of Evaluation of Benchmarking Tool were presented. After these introductory meetings the representatives of VET providers performed the tests of the benchmarking tool on their premises and submitted the evaluation questionnaires to ASEV in electronic format. Subsequently, the participants and the data from the questionnaires were registered at the BEQUAL online portal.

Although different approaches towards the methodology have been taken in the above-mentioned countries, they all succeeded in conducting successful meetings with VET institutions. During those meetings, information about the BEQUAL tool and portal and QA in VET in general was presented to all of the participants. The VET providers tested the functionalities of the benchmarking tool and completed evaluation questionnaires afterwards.

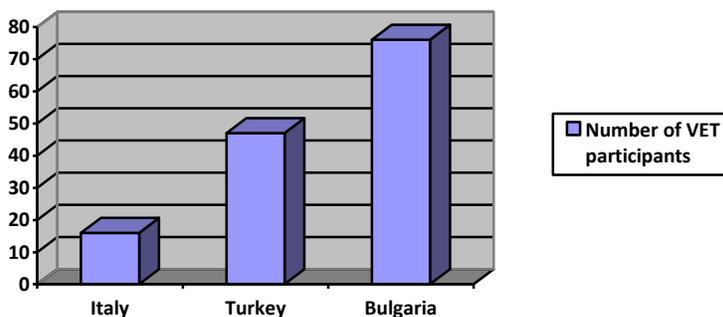
Date of pilot and information for participants

In Turkey the pilot activities took place between April 1 and April 16 2013. Two workshops were organized in Sisli in April 12 and April 16 and face to face meeting took place in BAU Research Center. The venues hosted 47 participants who represented the management departments of 13 Upper secondary vocational Education and Training institutions, 29 Higher vocational education centers and 5 Further education and training institutions (Fig.1).

In Bulgaria the first seminar was held in Plovdiv on 15 February 2013, with 27 participants attending the event. The second meeting took place in Pleven (28 participants) and the third in Sofia (21 participants) on 22 February 2013 and 7 March 2013 respectively. The attendants at the seminar included principals of VET high schools, colleges and managers of centers for vocational education and training.

Fifteen individual meetings were conducted between 25 January 2013 and 25 March 2013 in seven different cities in Tuscany region in central Italy. Two of the meetings were organized at ASEV (Empoli, Tuscany) premises on 5 February 2013 and one VET institution was contacted through phone and submitted the questionnaires by mail on 25 March 2013. At the meetings attended participants who represented the management departments of 4 Lower secondary vocational Education and Training institutions, 2 Post-Secondary Non-Tertiary VET institutions, 4 Higher vocational education centers and 6 Further education and training institutions. The majority of the participants were directors of VET institutions or in charge of Quality Assurance.

Figure 1: Number of VET participants in the pilot phase



Issues/Constraints

Difficulties involving gathering of photos and information about institutions such as correct name of schools incurred at the workshops in Turkey. Participants were also not willing to provide objective

and unbiased information about the real conditions and situations in the institutions that they represented. In Italy the geographic location of the VET centers and institutions was reported as a hindrance by ASEV. Not all of the contacted institutions have agreed to participate, thus ASEV has managed to involve in the pilot only 16 organizations.

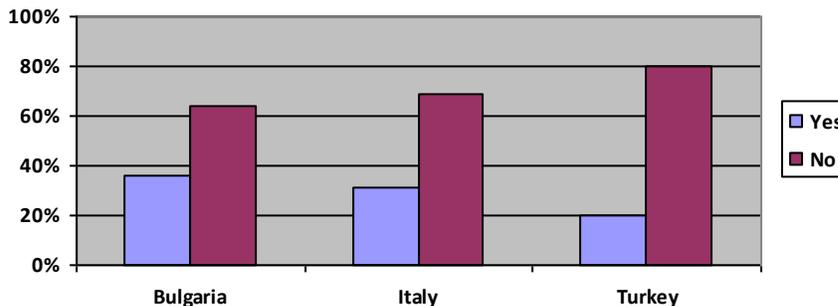
IV. Results from the pilot

Participants' experience with similar tools

During the pilot events the participants were asked to answer questions about the previous experience with similar benchmarking tools. The pilot activity was the first experience for 80% of the participants in Turkey, 64% of the participants in Bulgaria and 69% of the participants in Italy (Fig.2).

The results from the evaluation questionnaires show that the majority of the participants did not have previous experience with similar benchmarking tools, which creates significant potential for utilization of the BEQUAL tool.

Figure 2: Participants' experience with using benchmarking tools



Participants' evaluation of the benchmarking tool

During the pilot benchmarking the participants gave qualitative and quantitative assessment. In the course of the discussions were generated comments, critics and suggestions that formed the qualitative assessment of the benchmarking tool.

Quantitative evaluation was based on the responses of the participants of the questionnaires. The respondents were asked to evaluate the BEQUAL tool on several criteria such as structure of the

benchmarking tool, the quality of questions, the provided instructions, the comprehensibility of the presented information and the convenience of the tool.

On average the majority of the participants gave positive responses about the structure of the tool and the quality of the questions. They found the tool convenient and the presented information comprehensible. The provided instructions were evaluated as very good, too.

The results show, however, that there is leeway for improvement in the clarity and simplicity of the questions and evaluation scale. A common problem between Bulgarian VET providers was misunderstanding the examples (Tab.1). The examples were considered as part of the questions and not merely as illustrations of cases and many of the respondents evaluated the examples not the questions. Thus the main critic that was pointed by the respondents to the benchmarking questionnaire was that a part of the questions was not very clear and was not relevant to all types of VET providers. Italian participants met similar problem in respect to the clarity of the questions and simplicity of the questions (Tab.2). In addition, the Italian VET providers, as well as the Bulgarian that participated in the pilot benchmarking considered the evaluation scale and methodological explanations too complicated and difficult to comprehend.

Table 1: Participants' evaluation of the benchmarking tool in Bulgaria

	Excellent	Good	Adequate	Inadequate
The tool as a whole	31%	53 %	13%	
The structure of the benchmarking tool	33%	53%	11%	
Quality of questions	29%	49%	18%	2%
Clarity of questions	27%	44%	27%	
Simplicity of questions	13%	56%	24%	2%
Instructions provided	49%	44%	2%	
Evaluation scale	29%	40%	22%	2%
Comprehensibility of presented information	38%	42%	13%	
Relevance and applicability to the target group	20%	53%	16%	2%
Convenience of using the tool	62%	33%	2%	
Time needed to complete it	22%	56%	9%	

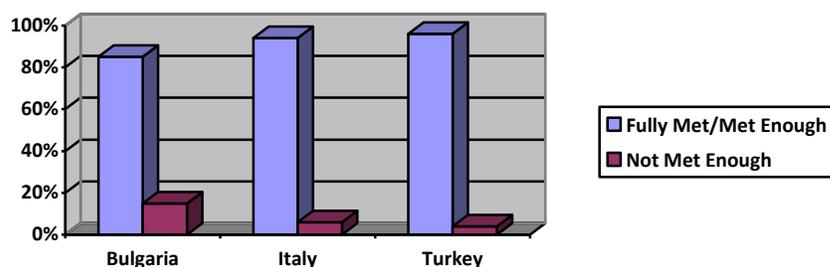
Table 2: Participants' evaluation of the benchmarking tool in Italy

	Excellent	Good	Adequate	Inadequate
The tool as a whole	12.5%	81.25%	6.25%	
The structure of the benchmarking tool	18.75%	68.75%	12.5%	
Quality of questions	31.25%	62.5%	6.25%	1
Clarity of questions	37.5%	37.5%	25%	
Simplicity of questions	31.25%	50%	18.75%	
Instructions provided	12.5%	68.75%	18.75%	
Evaluation scale	18.75%	43.75%	37.5%	
Comprehensibility of presented information	25%	68.75%	6.25%	
Relevance and applicability to the target group	12.5%	56.25%	31.5%	
Convenience of using the tool		75%	18.75%	
Time needed to complete it	25%	68.75%	6.25%	

Does the benchmarking tool meet the participants' expectations

The results from the pilot benchmarking demonstrated that the participants' expectations were satisfied. Only small part of the respondents have pointed that their expectations were not met enough (Fig.3).

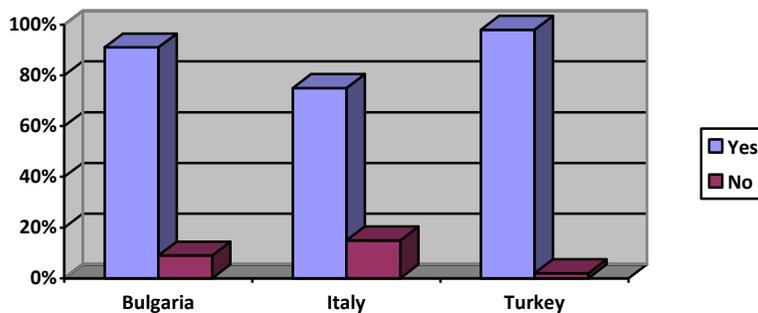
Figure 3: Participants' expectations of the benchmarking tool



Assessment of the contribution of the benchmarking tool to QA application on VET provider level

The majority of the respondents recognized the potential of BEQUAL tool in the Quality Assurance process. 91% of the participants in Bulgaria and 75% of the participants in Italy agreed that the tool has a potential to encourage the implementation of application of quality assurance in their VET organizations. In Turkey the majority of the respondents also admitted the role of the benchmarking tool for Quality Assurance application in VET institution. Only 2 % of the participants were not interested in implementing the tool (Fig.4).

Figure 4: Participants’ recognition of the potential of the BEQUAL tool in the QA process



Identified needs for improvement

During the pilot benchmarking several areas for improvement were identified by the participants. One of the areas that needed improvement according to the reported responses is the clarity of the questions. Many of the participants pointed out that some of the questions should be formulated better and the abbreviations further explained. Similarly, too long and less direct sentences caused confusion in some of the respondents. Inclusion of too many examples also was listed as a source of confusion. Also the participants found some of the questions irrelevant to their practical experience as VET providers and not applicable to all types of VET institutions. Furthermore some of the questions are regarded as not well adapted to the institutions of different sizes and the type of organizations.

A few improvements were suggested in restructuring of the benchmarking tool and the process. Such recommendations included creating a less complicated and 3-option evaluation scale. Lack of self-assessment questions for the VET trainers and questions about the capacity of the

organizations to build networks with other institutions was pointed out as shortcoming by the participants. Another topic regarded as necessary by the participants, but not included in the questionnaires, is the questions about the VET equipment and its quality. Participants in Bulgaria and Turkey also saw as a drawback the lack of an option to update the questionnaires and report progress more than once per year. Options such as to go back to the previous page, skip a question and delete an account were suggested as recommendable.

Some concerns of the participants about the access to the BEQUAL tool were also. Unlimited access to the tool, according to the responses of the participants, had negative effect on the benchmarking and would distort the overall results. As a drawback was also pointed the lack of defined criteria about who could be an authorized user of the tool in terms of position in institution.

V. Recommendations

Several suggestions for improvements have been defined during the pilot benchmarking. It was recommended that the structure of the sentences should be refined in order to become clear that the option bellow each of the questions is only example. Also the questions could be made shorter and clearer definition of the abbreviations should be provided. Furthermore, the questions should be developed in a way that the participants can consider them applicable for different types and sizes of VET institutions. Suggestions were made that the questions could be adapted in order to be more relevant with the local environments of the VET providers. In addition, the evaluation scale could be simplified with more clearly defined parameters. Improvements, such as automatic email notification and link for confirmation, should be made in the current registration procedure considered by the participants too liberal and imposing a risk for unauthorized distortion of the benchmarking data. Also an option for deleting the created account by the users could be introduced.

VI. Conclusion

Significant potential for utilization of the BEQUAL tool exists since most of the VET providers have no previous experience of using assessment/benchmarking tools related to quality assurance in VET. In Turkey 80 % of the VET providers were unfamiliar with the tool. In Bulgaria and Italy the percentage of the participants with no previous experience is also high- 64% and 69% respectively. The successful test of the tool encouraged about 75% of the Italian participants to get more involved with the application of Quality Assurance in their organization. Similarly, Bulgarian partners (NAVET and IWG) successfully used the pilot activities to build confidence in the final beneficiaries and to contribute for utilizing the implementation of quality assurance



tools in VET. As excellent or good, majority of the participants regarded convenience of the tool, the instructions provided, the quality of the questions, comprehensibility of the presented information and the tool as a whole.

During the benchmarking process, however, need of improvement was identified in the area of the clarity and simplicity of the questions and evaluation scale. 27% of the participants in Bulgaria and 25% of those in Italy defined the “clarity of the questions” simply as adequate. Also a cause of dissatisfaction was the evaluation scale – 22 % of the Bulgarian users defined it as merely “adequate” and 2% as “inadequate”. The percentage of the Italian participants who had concerns about it was even higher – 37 %.

Despite the fact that most of the participants gave favorable grades for the instructions provided, there was a misunderstanding of the examples provided with the questions. Most of the participants did not regard the examples just as illustrations, but as conditions which were part of the questions. This produced general perception that not all questions were relevant. Since part of the practices provided as examples were found impossible to be applied in VET high schools, VET providers believed that the questions are irrelevant. This could produce negative effect on the evaluation and jeopardize the acceptance and implementation of the tool as a whole.

Some concerns about the current registration process were raised. Participants in Bulgaria found the process too liberal and were afraid that it could undermine the reliability of the benchmarking data.

As a long-term impact of the experience of using the BEQUAL tool, some participants pointed that the tools would lead to raising awareness about the quality assurance processes involved in the management systems.