



Network to strengthen the relation between VET and the world of work at the governance and implementation level

Project Number: 527826-LLP-1-2012-1-BE-LEONARDO-LNW

D.4.2 Validated online Benchmarking Tool

CONTROL SHEET

Project title	VETWORK
Programme	Lifelong Learning Programme, Leonardo da Vinci Network
Project n°	527826-LLP-1-2012-1-BE-LEONARDO-LNW
Work-Package n°	4 Piloting and validation of vetwork benchmarking
Deliverable n°	D.4.2
Authors	SOPHIA R&I
Contact details	info@sophiari.eu
Contributors	All partners
Contractual Date of Delivery	09/2014
Actual Date of Delivery	10/2015
Method of Distribution:	Publication on the project website; Link sent via mail

This project has been funded with support from the European Commission. This publication reflects the views only of the author, and the Commission cannot be held responsible for any use which may be made of the information contained therein.



@ VETWORK Partnership 2012-2015. Reproduction is authorised, except for commercial purposes, provided the source is acknowledged

Table of Contents

INTRODUCTION.....	4
RATIONALE	5
TERMINOLOGY AND DEFINITIONS.....	5
I. PILOTING & VALIDATION PHASE	6
II. DESCRIPTION OF ONLINE BENCHMARKING TOOL	6
III. TECHNICAL IMPROVEMENT SUGGESTED FOR THE TOOL	7
IV. PILOTING RESULTS FOR FUTURE STRATEGIC IMPROVEMENTS	8

INTRODUCTION

The VETWORK project (Network to strengthen the relation between VET and the world of work at the governance and implementation level), supported by the Life Long Learning Education program, under the Audiovisual and Culture Executive Agency of the European Commission, deals with the integration of Vocational Educational Training (VET) and the world of work.

The VETWORK project is organized in work packages. WP4 is dedicated to the Piloting and Validation of the Benchmarking Tool. In fact, the project scope was to adapt and apply benchmarking methodologies and tools within the VET-WORK integration framework and to find an efficient way for VET providers to meet the needs of work world.

That is the reason why the VETWORK team has developed an online Benchmarking Tool to allow self-assessment and measurement of integration effectiveness between VET and the world of work. The tool helps VET providers to self-assess and to compare the extent and the concrete ways through which they collaborate with the world of work. The Benchmarking Tool is meant to measure the effectiveness of integration between training as provided by VET specialized institutions and organizations, and training as provided in the workplace. Building on the results of the good practice comparative analysis carried out by project Partners, the Benchmarking Tool will specifically measure features such as: methodological and organizational innovation, excellence, quality assurance, assessment and certification of formal and informal learning, mobility, role of the tutor at the workplace, the degree of integration between VET and the world of work.

The benchmark is subdivided in four sections analysing the INPUT, the PROCESS, the OUTCOMES and the CONTEXT criteria with regard to the VET organization. By simply replying to the questions posed by the Benchmarking Tool, especially if the exercise is conducted collectively by a working team including the main management positions, the VET provider is stimulated to reflect on its performance as well as to recognize the weak areas that shall be addressed to enhance VET- Work integration. Once the User completes a benchmarking section, a score will be calculated based on answers. The tool gives a score between 0 and 5 for each question. Higher scores are for organizations that are more advanced in the VET training process. The score is given both as an absolute value and as a % of the maximum potential score. The minimum score is also provided, as well as the time used to complete the benchmark.

The tool will help users to assess to which extent training as delivered by VET providers is applied and used at the workplace, thereby also measuring the so-called “learning gap” and “implementation gap” and enhancing a reflection on strategies to be adopted to improve their performance. The present report gives an overview on the results of the Piloting and how the BM Tool has been validated.

RATIONALE

The Benchmarking Tool has been defined to allow VET organizations to answer the following questions: Does your vocational training always match the needs of the world of work? Do you consider your training offer as custom-fit or do you think you can still make improvements?

The VETWORK online benchmarking system intends to assess whether provision in vocational programmes reflects constantly changing employer and employees' needs. The VETWORK Benchmarking Tool asks users for data designed to evaluate where advanced learning could lead to better employability possibilities. And on the other hand with the use of the benchmarking tool the users become aware how important consistent assessment is, and how to improve qualification frameworks in line with requirements of the work world. The VETWORK benchmarking tool wants to enable the users to become aware of critical success factors and important questions to answer:

- In which cases and how to provide different types of training (dual vocational training, work based training, in-company training)?
- How to manage qualification frameworks consistent between employees' competences and employers' requirements?
- How to define and assess learning outcomes?

TERMINOLOGY AND DEFINITIONS

BENCHMARKING DEFINITION

- (1) Benchmarks** - The term "benchmarks" refer to processes and results that represent best practices and performance for similar activities, inside or outside the education community. Organisations engage in benchmarking to understand the current dimensions of good performances and to achieve discontinuous or "breakthrough" improvement.
- (2) Benchmarks** - are one form of comparative data. Other comparative data organizations might use/ include appropriate data collected by a third party (frequently averages for other organizations), data on the performance of comparable education organizations and competitors and comparisons with similar organizations that are in the same geographic area or that provide similar programs, offerings, and services in other geographic areas.
- (3) Benchmarks** - (industry-wide) standards, usually showing the best performance possible at a certain time. Or: 'A measured, "best-in-class" achievement; a reference or measurement standard for comparison; this performance level is recognised as the standard of excellence for a specific business process.'

I. PILOTING & VALIDATION PHASE

Benchmarking to achieve excellence is an on-going process. As well, the development of the Benchmarking Tool was an ongoing process: it went through a two-steps evaluation, and internal testing; it was then opened to the public for a piloting phase and later went through a process of validation, which led to the final validated version of the Benchmarking tool as it is today.

During the Piloting phase, the involved stakeholders - companies and other VET organisations - were invited via newsletter, e-mail, magazines, social media and direct networking activities to participate in the testing of the tool through a structured interview or focus groups.

Validation

Once the results of the benchmarking interviews have been produced and analysed, the final step was to convert the results of the piloting into an improved version of the Benchmarking Tool. While focusing on the tool itself determined few technical interventions, the most part of the feedback of the Piloting intended to define a long term action plan. These recommendations are reported here, as a reference for future improvement and inputs for strategic reflection.

II. DESCRIPTION OF ONLINE BENCHMARKING TOOL

The Online Benchmarking Tool is available for the public at <http://www.vetwork.it>.

The BM Tool has been developed by SOPHIA R&I as a result of the work done for WP3. The Tool is based on sets of questions, along with selected criteria and indicators. By replying to the questions, users will get an assessment of their performance as well as a highlight of the weak areas that shall be addressed to enhance integration between VET and the world of work.

To facilitate the benchmarking exercise, the Tool is available in several languages: English, German, Spanish, Italian, French and Rumanian (as you can see from the below screenshots).

The benchmark is subdivided in four sections analysing the INPUT, the PROCESS, the OUTPUT/OUTCOMES and the CONTEXT criteria with regard to the VET organisation. Each benchmark section requires about 10/15 minutes to be completed and comprises a set of questions. Only one answer per question is allowed and the last question allows to record comments on the questions and on the benchmark section in general. The tool gives a score between 0 and 5 for each question, based on the answer given. Higher scores are for organisations that are more advanced in the VET training process. The score is given both as an absolute value and as a % of the maximum potential score. The minimum score is also provided, as well as the time used to complete the benchmark. Where possible a general feedback is also provided.

For more details on the Benchmarking Tool, you find a whole overview in D.3.1 and D.3.2.

III. TECHNICAL IMPROVEMENT SUGGESTED FOR THE TOOL

From the piloting phase and the feedbacks collected among the stakeholders who tried the Tool, a number of technical requirements have been asked to VETWORK partners in order to improve the usability and friendliness of the BM Tool. These improvements are listed here below, some have been implemented already, while others are being implemented right now. As said before, the work on improving and adapting the benchmarking system will proceed well beyond the project life.

1. To diversify the choice for I-VET and C-VET
2. To be developed also for companies and enterprises
3. To add a detailed set of statistics concerning the results obtained by other testers so to understand the trends and potential divergences
4. To give the possibility to choose for more than 1 partnership
5. To clearly add the choice of "not interested" and add next to it a space for explanations. So far comments are possible only at the end of a specific chunk.
6. It is useful to facilitate self-reflection of the organisation staff, useful to implement further discussions with peers, but to this purpose statistics are required
7. To include an answer of "nor applicable" to some questions that may not be relevant for all
8. The particular feedback was not considered very useful, but the exercise was perceived as a reflection process of what can be done. Maybe a next development might be to enrich the feedback.

IV. PILOTING RESULTS FOR FUTURE STRATEGIC IMPROVEMENTS

The German and Austrian Piloting conducted by IB and BFI

The major outcomes from the interviews with our partner companies are that practical training must be located in the responsibility of companies. According to this the strategic recommendation is to create a European VET area with a strong work based training approach.

Because in countries with a tradition of work-based VET, the cooperation of state institutions (schools) and enterprises has turned out to be a model for success when it comes to combating youth unemployment. Only in this way the world of VET can be brought together with the world of work efficiently. The Chambers, which also exist in countries with full-time school VET, can play an important role in this matter. The Chambers should not only be included in the formation process of the respective VET-systems, but in addition should be assigned as an institution to define quality standards for VET and develop criteria for generally accepted examination and assessment procedures and the recognition of professional qualifications.

Our lessons (IB and BFI) learnt during this project and also the long-term experiences in Germany and Austria prove that the Chambers can bear a large share of responsibility in this field. As mentioned above, it is not enough to introduce the “dual VET system” in all EU member states, keeping in mind the socio-cultural differences are numerous and pronounced. In future those differences should play a minor role instead “work-based training” and “work-placed training” should be a common and important part of vocational training and education settings.

IB / BFI as active members of EVBB, European Association of VET Providers, have worked on these recommendations together with other EVBB members and therefore can prove that it is not only valid for countries with an existing dual VET-system. These recommendations are coherent to other results of jointly conducted events in European Parliament together with members of European parliament and with representatives of the EC. By chance it was stated there that a common European approach has to be established where the responsibility for the practical parts of VET is assigned to employers respectively companies. If European VET develops more in this direction the result will be in the end a more united world of VET and work.

Further recommendations concerning the on-line tool are aimed at the selection of benchmarking partners. VET providers/employers usually choose comparable companies in terms of characteristics such as line of industry, size or certain regions/countries where they operate. Furthermore easy access to the tool could be enhanced by a less detailed and anonymous registration.

Another important conclusion on the online-benchmarking tool regards access policy. In-depth benchmarking with smaller benchmarking groups creates more short-term added value since it means less investment in organisational terms. Therefore we recommend not to use open access policy since it is clear that work-based learning is an important issue but to work through the different interview items allows easily to define new common goals and targets.

The Piloting in Italy

The Italian piloting was conducted by SOPHIA R&I during the second half of 2015.

In spite of an intensive communication campaign, it was only possible to bring two VET providers to perform the self-assessment through the On-line Benchmarking tool. These two companies are EYES Italia and HC Training. Both VET providers work within the area of unemployed people and skills improvement for employed people. The fact that only two VET companies could have been involved is a result somewhat below expectations, in respect to the extensive dissemination and networking activity carried on. It is probably due to the fact that the need for improving the relationships between the VET providers and the world of work is not yet clearly perceived by the Italian VET providers, and this in turn might be due to way in which VET is funded and evaluated in Italy. This indicates a path for mainstreaming activities in the post-project sustainability phase.

Both VET providers have been asked to use the VETWORK Online Benchmarking Tool (BMT) for the self assessment, and we have interviewed them after using the tool. The feedbacks collected on the Benchmarking Tool was quite consistent for both VET providers, and centered on the following issues:

- The BMT could become a useful tool for improving the final output of the training provided by the company but its usage should be simplified and streamlined, especially the number of mandatory questions should be reduced as performing the whole self-assessment process is very much time consuming;
- Some aspects which they consider important are not addressed, such as the funding mechanisms for VET which deeply influence the relationship with the companies. It has to be said however that this point is very much country-dependent and therefore it is difficult to implement it at European level;
- Both found that the main element of success is the subsequent phase of designing an improvement path and that there should be the possibility of performing this step in a semi automated way. However this is a very difficult task and could form the objective of an additional project.

As a conclusion of the Italian pilot it can be said that the feedback from the other countries have been confirmed and that further path for improvements for the VETWORK BM Tool have been identified and could be implemented through subsequent developments.

The Piloting in Spain

In order to validate the VETWORK Benchmarking tool, it was organised a piloting and validation sessions, in Granada by CCGR, to which most relevant VET providers at regional level and usually collaborating with the Chamber were invited. The session was held last 17 November 2015 with a total participation of 17 participants.

The structure of the session was as follows:

- Welcome to participants and presentation of the VETWORK project rationale and aims – 10 minutes
- Presentation of the VETWORK Benchmarking tool – 20 minutes
- Trial of the tool by two of the participants through the internet, displaying the screen to all participants so everybody could see the process and the real functioning of the tool – 1 hour
- Questions by participants and comments on the tool by all the participants

The session was very satisfactory and participants showed an interest in the tool at every moment.

Due to the nature of the validation session, it was not possible that all partners did an in-depth and reflected use of the tool but however we had the advantage of the opinions and ideas of many users with different profiles and backgrounds.

The general conclusions from the group were essentially on the usefulness and future use of the Tool, so are listed below as strategic recommendations for the future:

- The VETWORK Benchmarking tool is very useful to analyse our competitive position and the quality of the training offer in terms of adequacy to the labour market needs
- The tool has a high potential to be part of the VET managements tools that VET providers use on a regular basis, however, most of them agreed on the fact that they would need further analysis and training on how to integrate this benchmarking tool in their VET management processes.
- Some of the participants showed their interest and commitment to test the tool more in depth to analyse and get a better insight on how this integration could be implemented.
- Many of the participants, representing small consultancies and VET providers expressed that the tool would be useful as a first step to set the basis for collaboration processes in which several small providers would join forces to provide a more quality and competitive training offer that otherwise they can not provide and therefore compete with the biggest VET providers who are usually the ones getting highest scores in a benchmarking process, being much closer to the benchmark.
- Some of them expressed the challenges that the Benchmarking tool has to face in the next months when starting the real exploitation process:
 - How the benchmark which is in the basis of the system is going to be updated?
 - How the results of the benchmarking process can be the basis to start collaborative process for joining efforts in the provision of training?

Indeed, some comments by the participants' evidences the satisfaction of the participants with the tool and the possibilities for continue developing and exploiting the tool.

- *“A really good tool to support us in better approaching the definition of our annual training offer”*
- *“ It is not very easy to use and take quite a lot of time to complete the full questionnaires but the results would worth if they help us to improve our quality”*
- *“ I really appreciate the work behind this tool and I personally commit to explore it more in detail as my small contribution to the improvement of VET training offer in the province”*

Therefore, the results of the piloting sessions serve to validate the Benchmarking tool and provided us with interesting ideas and work paths to continue improving and developing the VETWORK benchmarking tool.