

VocMat

Interim evaluation

January 2007

Table of contents

Introduction	1
VocMat objectives	1
Method	2
Baseline position.....	2
Desired changes through VocMat.....	2
Findings.....	7
Are the original reasons for the project still valid?.....	7
Were the needs of the target group addressed?	7
Has the project been efficiently administered?	9
Co-operation and partnership.....	11
Other issues going forward:	11
Innovation	11
Sustainability.....	11
Marketing	12
Conclusion	13
Issues for the programme going forward.....	13

Introduction

This interim evaluation report marks the mid-point of the VOCMAT project. It aims to provide an independent assessment of the project for partners and funders at the mid-point. The main aims are:

To assess whether the project is on track to meet its objectives;

To note, and comment on, any major departure from the original plan;

To record any learning points from the project so far; and

To recommend any corrective actions for the programme management to consider over the rest of the project.

VocMat objectives

The VocMat project aims to develop a new innovative, flexible training method for middle and senior management staff in the European tourism industry. The specific objectives of this Leonardo funded project are to

- “Produce an agreed approach for improving the management skills and competencies of middle and senior management staff in tourism organisations;
- Identify the key management skills needed by the tourism sector in partner countries and means of addressing them through training;
- Develop a suite of leading edge training products, procedures and processes (including e-learning) that will be transferable geographically and across the diversity of the tourism sector;
- Promote the improvement of key management skills by using transnational working groups and reference to leading practice Europe-wide in tourism and other sectors;
- Promote quality in, and access to, management training in a vocational setting through dissemination throughout this and other sectors in Europe;
- Develop and transfer innovation in vocational management training and, in doing so, provide the means to promote competitiveness and entrepreneurship;
- Share best practice in vocational management training between tourism organisations throughout Europe and to leave a legacy of networking between organisations;
- Make equal opportunities an integral part of management training in the tourism industry.”

Method

As part of the project's monitoring and evaluation, VocMat commissioned Hall Aitken to produce a baseline. This report compares the current position to that recorded in the baseline report as far as is practicable except that it is not possible to provide comparative statistical analysis at this stage. The full comparison will take place in the final evaluation.

The report has therefore relied on:

1. Interviews and discussions with project management and partners;
2. A review of surveys and monitoring data collected since the baseline was compiled;
3. The baseline report;
4. the project application and extensive documentation.

Baseline position

The baseline position was completed in July 2006. It identifies a range of qualitative and quantitative indicators, most of which relate to the final evaluation rather than the mid term.

In this report, it is useful to look at the areas that were identified as being where the changes were expected. These are described in the next section.

Desired changes through VocMat

Skills gaps and training needs

The average rating of skills levels in all areas surveyed is between fair and satisfactory:

- Marketing (2.2)
- Strategic management (2.4)
- Human resources (2.4)
- Providing quality service (2.5)
- Operational management (2.6)

The research of the VocMat R&D Group needs to address these skills gaps through new training contents and possibly some additional areas like time management and information management. Further research is needed - into these additional skills as well as the other skills areas because of limited data. Skills related to managing people should get special attention, as well as the IT skills necessary for using on-line training. As a

transnational partnership the project will be in a position to address skills related to managing international staff.

Availability of training

Generally, staff can undertake training during working hours with employers paying for it. But the new training modules should be flexible to improve accessibility. The target group favours a mix of face-to-face and on-line training. Addressing both private and public sector needs is important.

Qualifications

In response to an identified lack of recognised qualifications the new VocMat system should develop accreditation for the training modules. This includes exploring the European Credit Transfer Scheme.

Partnership working

Partnership working through the VocMat project is an opportunity to improve partnership working in the tourism industry in general and to establish and further develop lasting networks. The number of meetings, videoconferencing sessions, newsletters, workshops and use of the on-line forum will serve as indicators towards this.

Support throughout

The success of the project will partly depend on how involved people feel and what support they get from the project partners, but also from one another. Support through subject leaders, local mentors and other participants through the on-line forum will contribute to increased motivation and professionalism.

Using training

Where management training is available it doesn't always get used. It is important the VocMat research identifies barrier to use so they can be addressed.

Research gaps

Research undertaken so far has shown there are gaps in existing research on tourism management training. Specifically there is a need for research on non-academic training in a vocational setting. This is one of the areas where VocMat can be innovative, which is one of the project objectives.

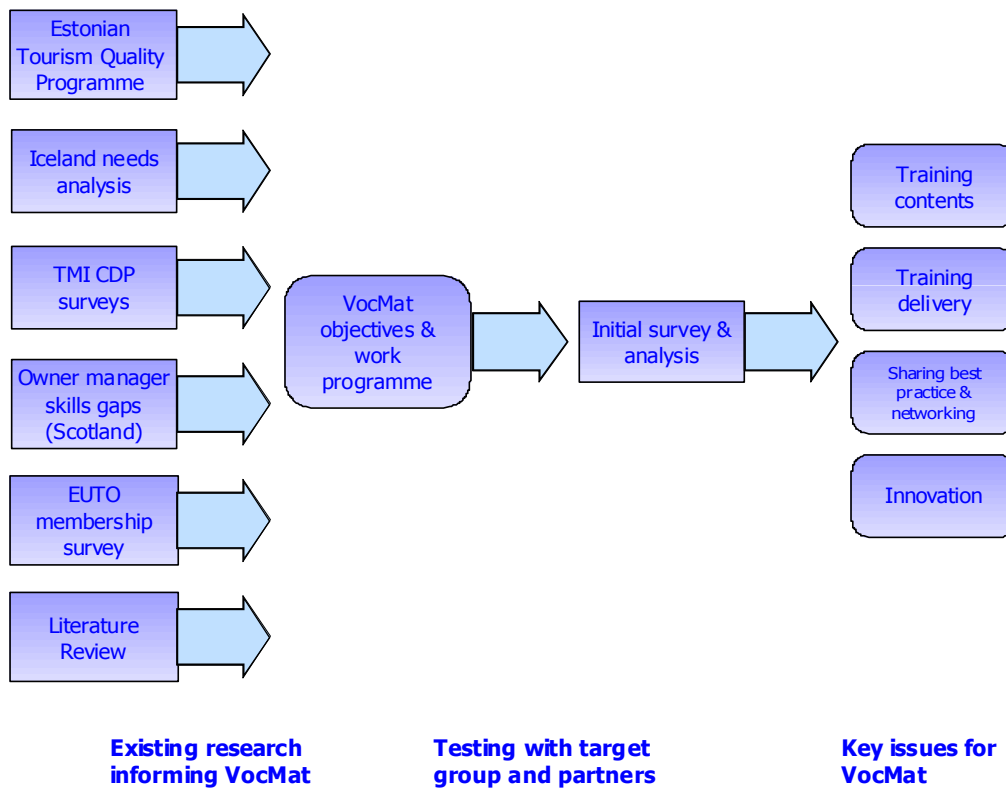
Image of tourism

Research participants were aware of the poor reputation of the tourism industry and a lack of awareness of issues around management training. Through extensive valorisation of project results as outlined in the dissemination strategy VocMat can potentially make a big difference here.

Various pieces of research have informed the VocMat work programme. The diagram below shows the most important research work influencing VocMat and how the baseline was developed. Details of the existing research are in the VocMat research report¹.

¹ *VocMat research report and training needs analysis*, Cathy Guthrie, March 2006

• Figure 1 Developing a baseline



The work to develop the baseline was carried out in conjunction with Vocmat and reflects the limited amount of hard quantitative data available then. It also reflects the need for qualitative assessments to play a large part in the monitoring and evaluation of the programme

Areas for change

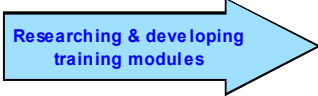
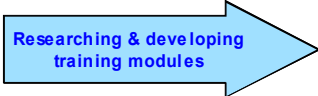
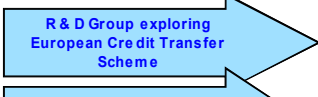

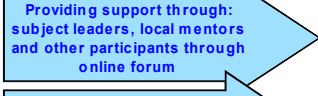
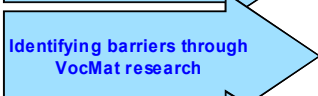

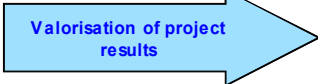
From the objectives, we have identified the following areas for change, which may be monitored or evaluated:

- Identifying training needs and means of addressing them
- Developing training products and processes
- Transnational working
- Access to training
- Quality of training
- Developing innovation
- Sharing best practice and networking.

Measuring progress

The outcomes VocMat aims to achieve are mostly qualitative rather than quantitative which makes it difficult to set quantifiable targets. To a certain extent activities related to transnational working, sharing best practice and networking are quantifiable in that numbers of meetings, pilot training sessions, videoconferences and contacts with other

networks can be recorded. Innovation on the other hand is difficult to measure and there has been much discussion around this. If VocMat partners can agree on a common definition of innovation for tourism management training, evaluators will then be able to show, through interviews and possibly questionnaires, what progress has been made.

Baseline situation	VocMat activity	Desired outcome at end of VocMat project (2007)	Desired wider outcome
<p>Low skills levels (average rating): Providing quality service (2.5 = satisfactory-fair) Marketing (2.2 = fair) Operational management (2.6 = satisfactory) Strategic management (2.4 = fair) Human resources (2.4 = fair)</p> <p>Other (potential) skills gaps: Time management and work planning Team building skills Internal communication Information management Employment law IT skills for using online training</p>	 <p>Researching & developing training modules</p>	<p>Training contents addressing skills gaps of private and public sector organisations</p>	<p>Increased management skills levels across the European tourism industry in all priority areas (average rating 4 to 5 = high to outstanding)</p>
<p>Poor availability of and access to training, particularly in: online delivery, materials and assessment (2.0 = fair) CD-ROMs (2 = fair)</p>	 <p>Researching & developing training modules</p>	<p>Module based training system delivered through a combination of face to face and online training</p>	<p>Better availability of and access to flexible management training (average rating 4 to 5 = high to outstanding)</p>
<p>Lack of recognised qualifications</p>	 <p>R & D Group exploring European Credit Transfer Scheme</p>	<p>Accreditation of training modules</p>	<p>Transparent qualification system for tourism management training across Europe</p>
<p>Lack of partnership working among tourism organisations</p>	 <p>VocMat partnership working: meetings, online forum, videoconferencing, newsletters, workshops</p>	<p>Improved partnership working</p>	<p>Established partnerships and networks</p>
<p>Need for support to project participants</p>	 <p>Providing support through: subject leaders, local mentors and other participants through online forum</p>	<p>High levels of commitment and confidence</p>	<p>Improved professionalism and motivation</p>
<p>Low utilisation of available training</p>	 <p>Identifying barriers through VocMat research</p>	<p>Awareness of barriers</p>	<p>Increased utilisation of training</p>
<p>Gaps in existing research</p>	 <p>Research of Research & Development Group</p>	<p>Innovative products meeting identified demand</p>	<p>Increased research on vocational management training across Europe</p>
<p>Low levels of awareness and poor reputation of tourism industry</p>	 <p>Valorisation of project results</p>	<p>Improved levels of awareness</p>	<p>Improved tourism image</p>

Findings

Using the baseline report to assess progress and change, we have sought answers to a range of questions. In this section we assess evidence of whether the objectives are being met, and any changes that have been made to the project.

Are the original reasons for the project still valid?

The project has remained true to its original aims and objectives and any changes have been made for good reasons, for example streamlining reporting systems.

The original premise for the project was strong and well researched. It had (and has) a high level of commitment from partners, many of whom have a good track record of transnational partnerships.

The first round of pilots has produced the right outcomes: several operational changes to the way courses are put together, participants are recruited, and materials delivered. This is the function of a pilot and means there are inevitably some changes to the way the project is managed and administered. The true test of a project is not how well it can adhere to its original plan, but how well it manages the changes and deals with the problems that arise.

In this instance, the original reasons for the project have been more than borne out by the demand for training places, the response to training and the continuation through to the second phase of delivery and beyond.

Were the needs of the target group addressed?

The needs of both employers and employees are examined to see if there is progress towards the original aims. We test whether the programme's flexible delivery suits those with family commitments and those who live further away from existing training establishments.

Differences between employed and self-employed participants

The participants in the programme are a mixture of people in employment and self employed. Feedback suggests that the self employed participants are motivated and have encountered fewer difficulties with the first two modules than the employed group. The self employed group evidently have greater control over their use of time and found it easier to combine work and study.

There appears to be a reasonable level of support from employers for the participants. One instance of not being allowed to study in work time was reported. But this may not be the whole picture.

Work-life balance still an issue

The early leaver evaluation (covering modules 1 and 2) indicated the main reasons for leaving the programme early were work related:

- Too much to do at work
- No time at work

So insufficient support from an employer, or lack of appreciation of the benefits of staff development time, was a major contributing factor to the drop outs from the programme.

As it is a key aim of the programme to find ways for these employees to undertake this type of study, there are some issues to take on board for future phases.

An evaluation of the pilot modules reviewed feedback from 14 participants from Scotland, England, Northern Ireland and Estonia. Although not a large sample (14 out of ??) the information from this study is useful in assessing the effectiveness of the programme in its early stages.

The 14 participants all took the two modules (Strategic Management and Marketing). Only half the surveyed participants completed the two modules and 4 completed neither. The main reasons cited for non completion are time, and in one case, not knowing the deadline. Time covers the length of time that the modules took to complete, the time of year (summer – very difficult for people working in tourism businesses) and simply misjudging the time required for completion, despite guidance being given on the time commitment the course required.

According to the pilot module evaluation results, the mean time input by participants was just over 4 hours a week. The largest number of people actually spent less than 2 hours a week on their studies, but the figures are rendered more respectable by people studying 5 to 10 hours a week. Most respondents indicated they spent insufficient time on the study programme.

Management favoured over marketing

When asked about whether the training was helpful to personal development:

- All respondents rated the Strategic Management module as very or quite helpful; while
- Only 71% rated the Marketing module in the same way.

This may reflect a number of factors including previous knowledge of marketing. It is worthy of further investigation to establish whether this reflects the different modes of delivery and assessment.

Most participants rated the level of module content at about right and all except 2 thought that it was relevant.

Information technology

One respondent cited a lack of IT skills as the main reason. Presumably this issue can be addressed in the recruitment process but the baseline report² drew attention to the need

² Setting a baseline for the VocMat project, page 17

to provide additional support in IT skills. But it may be impractical to admit people who do not already have the IT skills needed to take part in the training.

The 'virtual learning environment' (VLE) was not used as frequently as it probably should be. The results show that only three people accessed the materials twice a week or more and the largest proportion admitted to accessing the system only once or twice a month. The figures reflect the relative lack of time input from participants. Most users found the VLE easy to use (typically 29% had difficulty though). Given the importance of IT to delivering the programme, there are clearly some issues still to be resolved.

Usage of the CD-ROM is broadly similar to the VLE although there is a slight bias towards the CD-ROM, suggesting this is preferred. Usage is still lower than is ideal and again reflects the limited time that most participants actually spent on study.

Most respondents in the survey thought that the different forms of contact with course leaders and mentors were about right or too little. A range of alternatives were offered in the survey and these were largely rejected.

The survey also picked up some general criticism that the materials were too UK-orientated, too advanced, academic or difficult to understand [the pilot materials are exclusively in English but the final versions will be translated locally]. The results were not universal and could reflect the different national groupings, mentor support or that the pilot groups are of slightly different levels. It is perhaps inevitable that some criticism is levelled at materials and level during a pilot.

Has the project been efficiently administered?

In our view the administration of the programme has been efficiently administered. There are four main areas of work, covering the seven original workstreams.

Project management

There is good evidence that the project is being managed efficiently and effectively:

1. The project is running more or less on schedule. The project leaders have completed 26 major milestones in project management, administration and finance. These are managed and monitored through regular reporting to the management group and recorded on a project management log. This also doubles as an issues log and records issues, problems and changes that have been made as the project progresses. It is a simple and effective project management tool that allows partners to monitor progress at a glance. The way that problems have been identified, addressed and solved has attracted favourable comment.
2. The project is financially well administered; most claims are submitted on time and funds distributed to partners without undue delay;
3. The project received a positive report from the Leonardo da Vinci monitoring team in August 2006³.

³ Leonardo Project Visit Activity Report, Ecotec July 2006

4. At the review meeting in October 2006, the project was reported to be on target and the model for training delivery revised in light of the first phase pilots.

Quality management

The project has adopted an integrated quality management plan and monitoring and evaluation framework. Originally two plans, these have been merged for practical reasons, as the same (or similar) information and reporting systems support the needs of both plans.

The internal monitoring system leads to quarterly reporting of progress to partners. The system is transparent and effective, giving the partners the chance to ask questions of the project's management regularly.

Research and development, delivery and testing

The project's 'engine room' is the research and development group which is responsible for developing the methods, learning materials, revising and delivering products to a diverse range of clients.

The achievements are impressive:

1. Three modules developed and one in development. The development of modules has followed the original plan.
2. The first two modules have been tested and amended. This has required a great deal of effort and co-operation from the academic partners.
3. Review of previous research completed. Surprisingly there is little existing research to contribute to the project's development.
4. Pilot groups recruited in 4 countries – the recruitment of participants has been successful and bears out the demand from the tourism sector for this form of training.
5. The VocMat model is being addressed as a whole and changes made in light of experience, for example in communication between the national groups, and the use of the VLE.

Valorisation

It would be fair to conclude that this is the area of activity where partners have expressed some disappointment over progress. The workstream is now being taken forward with renewed urgency.

The comprehensive valorisation strategy was agreed at the start of the project and sub-contracted to a specialist to deliver. Progress was made in some areas, however, despite many meetings of the group, the management group concluded that the contractor was not able to deliver the strategy as agreed and the contract was terminated.

This situation led to some of the key deadlines being missed, mainly those related to publicity and marketing of the scheme (particularly newsletters). Remedial action has been taken and there will be no adverse effects on the outcome of the project. The

VocMat website has proved to be attractive and effective. A re-launch of the project is planned for the meeting of the project in Copenhagen in February 2007.

Co-operation and partnership

This is an ambitious project combining the inputs from 8 major partners in 4 countries. It is worth noting that the partnership is geographically challenging, particularly in terms of the logistics of arranging meetings.

- Tourist Board Training
- Enterprise Estonia/Estonian Tourist Board
- Pärnu College of the University of Tartu
- The Icelandic Association of Tourist Officers
- Iceland School of Tourism
- Sheffield Hallam University
- Scottish Centre of Tourism, The Robert Gordon University
- Tourism Management Institute

As with all partnerships, there has been variable participation from the different partners, depending on resources and different demands on time.

There has been favourable comment on the partnership as a whole, and how it works. In particular the benefits of links between academic partners and with tourism organisations that would not otherwise have the opportunity to work together have been highlighted.

Other issues going forward:

Innovation

Although this project is innovative (and is recognised as such) and therefore meets the criteria for Leonardo da Vinci projects, innovation is not seen as a crucial issue. The practicalities of transnational working, managing international projects, problem solving and delivering training across a diverse group of countries are of greater immediate concern to the partners. Yet these are precisely the elements that make the project innovative!

VocMat is a different development and delivery model from existing European education models. Some of the methods (continuous assessment, for example) are more familiar in some countries than others. The use of technology is also innovative and the project forms a good test bed for the combination of new methods and technologies.

Sustainability

There are questions about how the programme can be sustained after the project ends. These may be dealt with between now and the end of the programme.

There is a strong feeling that the partnerships that are developing should be able to continue.

Marketing

There seems to be a ready demand for these courses, perhaps some more than others. The issue of IPR (post project) will need to be addressed in the near future to allow full exploitation of the materials but the future marketing of the courses will need to be addressed in the near future as well. The project discussed and agreed that there would be two stages for IPR agreements, one during the project and the other post-project. The post-project agreement is to be set up and agreed soon.

Conclusion

Overall, the evaluation at the mid term stage is positive, although there are inevitably some issues to highlight. Some of these are purely operational; others may have implications for the running of the project and any successor programmes.

Issues for the programme going forward

Training course design and delivery

- better pre-course briefings and information to help participants manage the time and course assignments more efficiently;
- making sure that all participants can use the IT systems, and providing support if they do not;
- improved recruitment – there are skills (and equipment) requirements that need to be met;
- perhaps looking at ways of involving employers more in the programme to encourage better support for staff undertaking this form of personal development, and to sell the benefits to the firm.

Marketing and dissemination

There is some uncertainty as to how the programme will move forward after the end of the current LdV funding. This is probably due to the delays in implementing the valorisation strategy which should deal with the issues going forward, including IPR. This will be sorted.

Proposed curriculum

Developing a proposed curriculum is of the outputs from the project has not been progressed significantly so far. The groundwork for this element has essentially been laid through the developing and testing of modules. This shows that there is demand from tourism businesses and agencies for advanced (postgraduate diploma/ master's degree level) training in business and management. The emphasis is on operational skills that will allow the business to trade at a higher level.

Contact details

Client

Client contact	Liz Buchanan
Title	VocMat Mid-term evaluation
Version	Discussion Draft
Date	January 2007

Report author

Contact	Paul Buchanan
Direct Line	+44 (0)141 644 5290
Address	7 Field Grove Busby Glasgow G76 8SN
Fax	+44 (0) 141 644 5290
Email	pbaconsult@aol.com