

Addressing Training and Development Issues in European Tourism Management: The VocMat 2 Research Report

Executive Summary



**Prepared by Dr. Cathy Guthrie FTMI FTS
June 2008**

Addressing Training and Development Issues in European Tourism Management: The VocMat 2 Research Report

Executive Summary

1.0 Introduction and Purpose of the Report

1.1 The first VocMat project (October 2005-September 2007) developed and delivered a pilot programme of training for middle and senior managers in public and private sector tourism organisations, tested with pilot groups from England, Estonia, Iceland and Scotland. The new project will transfer elements of the existing VocMat curriculum and delivery model into new partner countries and new subject areas. The new project partnership includes industry and higher education partners from Catalonia, Estonia, Italy, Malta, Turkey and the United Kingdom. A research exercise was carried out as part of the first phase of VocMat2 to build on the research report and training needs analysis published as part of the original VocMat project.

2.0 Aims, Objectives and Approach

2.1 The aim of this research exercise was to provide a sound basis for the transfer of the existing VocMat curriculum and delivery model into additional partner countries and in additional subject areas. The objectives were:

- A) To update research reported previously (Guthrie, 2006)
- B) To identify which of the existing VocMat modules should be taken forward
- C) To identify which new subject area should be developed and tested, and
- D) To identify skills gaps and barriers to training in Catalonia, Italy, Malta and Turkey

2.2 This would be achieved by:

- Repeating the review of academic literature for articles published since 2005, using the same search terms and databases as in the previous report
- Reviewing existing programmes and provision at senior and middle management level in the tourism industry in new partner countries
- Investigating perceived existing skills levels and training needs across a range of subject areas relevant to the tourism industry in the new partner countries
- Identifying perceived and actual barriers to the take-up of training in the new partner countries

3.0 Findings

- 3.1 The academic literature continues to focus on theoretical and conceptual approaches, but there is an increasing attention to issues of employee retention and ways and means of delivering appropriate training.
- 3.2 Government policies and strategies recognise the need for specialised training to increase the professionalism of the tourism industry. However, the majority of provision continues to be through colleges and face to face delivery in short courses and full or part time programmes, with few online training programmes. Such online provision as is available either is aimed at a lower level or does not lead to a recognised qualification. Tourism managers continue to use one day courses as their main form of training.
- 3.3 Skills levels in the four areas addressed by the first VocMat project have improved slightly, but are still regarded as poor by nearly 50% of tourism managers. The area considered to be most in need of training is Strategic Management, particularly from the perspective of the sector as a whole. This is also seen as the most essential skill for tourism managers. In terms of skills areas not yet served by the VocMat model, the greatest need was for training in Entrepreneurship and Innovation.
- 3.4 The greatest barriers to training continue to be the difficulty of combining family commitments and training, and finding suitable online training. Nevertheless, distance learning and online methods of delivery were widely regarded as being most appropriate and suitable for tourism managers, despite the general lack of availability of these forms of training.
- 3.5 It is also considered very desirable to have the opportunity to exchange best practice with tourism managers in other European countries.

4.0 Conclusions

- 4.1 It is clear that there is an increasing focus on the need to increase the uptake of training and qualifications in the tourism industry. Furthermore, there is almost universal recognition by governments of importance of training for the tourism industry, and numerous strategic proposals to improve provision and delivery. However, whilst this is promising for the long term health of the industry, the majority of programmes do not as yet cater for the needs of existing managers for flexible and contextualised tourism management qualifications.
- 4.2 There is still a strong demand for training, and most particularly in strategic planning and in enterprise and innovation for tourism. It is clear, therefore, that the VocMat partners should carry forward the existing Strategic Planning module for delivery to a new set of pilot group participants, and that the priority subject area for development as an additional VocMat module should be Entrepreneurship and Innovation for Tourism.

- 4.3 There is unsatisfied demand for training in all the other subject areas, providing a sound basis on which to suggest additional modules to add to the existing content.
- 4.4 The VocMat delivery model of online learning, supported by CD-ROM and with the ability to download and print the materials for offline use, meets the needs of tourism managers. The reference to the desirability of including some opportunity for face to face delivery at key points such as the start of a course suggests that the VocMat practice of bringing participants together for induction sessions is an important element of the delivery model. The inclusion of discussion boards and scheduled online chats within the VocMat Virtual Learning Environment is also intended to foster a sense of community among participants. This will be further enhanced by the opportunity for pilot group participants to communicate with their fellow learners in their own language via in-country discussion boards.
- 4.5 The very high rating given to the value of available tourism industry related qualifications, and the opportunity to exchange best practice with European colleagues confirms that the VocMat programme provides opportunities for tangible and sought after benefits to managers in the European tourism industry. This indicates that participants should be encouraged to make more use of the tools within the VocMat Virtual Learning Environment which allow them to exchange views and experience with their colleagues in the other partner countries.

For further information and to obtain a copy of the full Research Report:

**VocMat Project: e-mail info@vocmat.com or visit the
VocMat website at www.vocmat.com**

Research Report: e-mail cathy.guthrie@dsl.pipex.com