

Tourism, Leisure and Culture



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VocMat Final Evaluation

Tourist Board Training

November 2007



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Introduction

This report sets out our findings of the final evaluation of the VocMat project. Meeting the requirements of the Leonardo National Agency for the UK, it provides an independent assessment of the project and identifies key issues for VocMat's future.

VocMat is a transnational partnership project funded under the EU Leonardo da Vinci Programme that set out to develop a training model to improve management skills within the European tourism sector. Previous research by VocMat partners had identified skills gaps and a need for flexible management training in a vocational setting. To address these needs partners from the UK, Estonia and Iceland developed the VocMat project, which started in October 2005 and will finish at the end of September 2007.

The partners in this successful transnational partnership are:

- Tourist Board Training (TBT) (Lead partner)
- Tourism Management Institute (TMI)
- Sheffield Hallam University (SHU)
- Scottish Centre of Tourism at Robert Gordon University (RGU)
- Enterprise Estonia / Estonian Tourist Board
- Parnu College of the University of Tartu
- Iceland School of Tourism (IST)
- Icelandic Association of Tourist Officers.

The specific objectives of VocMat 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 edge 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.

Evaluating VocMat

At the outset partners carried out research to establish the baseline for project activities. At mid point the internal interim evaluation looked at progress and identified issues that informed the project's development for the remaining Leonardo period. This final evaluation builds on the previous research, the findings of which are summarised below, including the feedback from a visit from the Leonardo UK National Agency.

Evaluation objectives

The final evaluation explores how well the project has met its objectives, and makes recommendations for future phases. More specifically it aims to answer a set of research questions:

- Were the needs of the target group addressed through VocMat?
- Has the VocMat approach to delivering training made it easier to access training?
- Have barriers to accessing and taking up training been removed?
- How well has the project been managed?
- How innovative has the project been?
- How has the project helped overcome the lack of recognised qualifications?
- How well has the project been valorised?
- How sustainable is the project?

Method

The approach combined partner interviews and a survey of pilot group participants with a system audit and desk research.

We spoke to project management and partners – except one Icelandic and one Estonian partner who were unavailable for interview – to get their views on different aspects of VocMat, mostly by telephone. An electronic survey went out to all pilot group participants. The response rate (8 out of 69) was low but together with monitoring data and notes from ongoing feedback gathering within the project results provided a relatively clear picture of the situation. One reason for the low response rate may have been a certain survey fatigue as participants had already been asked similar questions at several stages during the project.

We also sent out an electronic questionnaire to 51 potential end users from the VocMat valorisation database. Again the response rate was low. However, the low response rate was not considered a sign of low level of interest as the project has been approached by many interested organisations across different sectors.

A review of relevant documents and supporting systems provided information on how the project was run.

Building on previous findings

Planned impacts of VocMat

The baseline report from July 2006 identified a range of qualitative and quantitative indicators. It also identified the areas where the project aimed to make a difference.

Skills gaps and training needs

The average rating of skills levels surveyed was between fair and satisfactory. These were:

- Marketing
- Strategic management
- Human resources
- Providing quality service
- Operational management.

The research of the VocMat Research and Development Group needed to address these skills gaps through new training contents and possibly some additional areas like time management and information management. Further research was needed – into these additional skills as well as other skills areas. Skills related to managing people were to get special attention, as were IT skills necessary for using online training.

Availability of training

The baseline research showed that staff could generally undertake training during working hours. The training modules were expected to be flexible to improve accessibility. The target group favoured a mix of face-to-face and online learning. Addressing both public and private sector needs was an important issue.

Qualifications

In response to an identified lack of recognised vocational qualifications in tourism management the VocMat system should develop accreditation for the training modules and explore the European Credit Transfer Scheme.

Partnership working

Partnership working through VocMat is an opportunity to improve partnership working in the tourism industry in general and to establish and further develop lasting networks. Indicators are the number of meetings, workshops and so on.

Support throughout

As stated in the baseline report, the success of the project would partly depend on how involved people feel and what support they get through the project.

Using training

Where management training is available it does not always get used. VocMat's remit included identifying barriers so it could contribute to removing them.

Research gaps



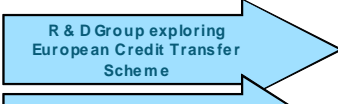
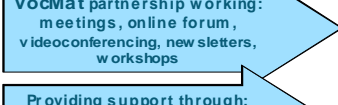
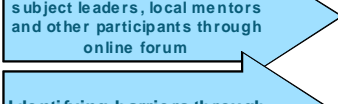
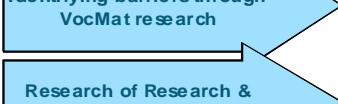
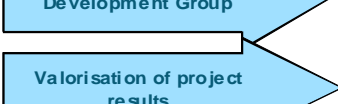
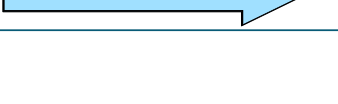
VocMat also has to fill a gap in research, particularly focusing on research on non-academic management training.

Image of tourism

Participants in the baseline research were aware of the poor reputation of the tourism industry and lack of awareness of issues around management training.

Figure 1 overleaf illustrates the desired changes through VocMat starting from the baseline situation.

Figure 1 - Baseline summary table

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 workplanning Team building skills Internal communication Information management Employment law IT skill 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, new 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>

What the interim evaluation found

The interim evaluation report highlighted some 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;
- Exploring ways of involving employers in the programme to encourage better support for staff.

Marketing and dissemination

Due to delays in implementing the valorisation strategy there was a high level of uncertainty at the time of the interim evaluation as to how the project would move forward after the end of Leonardo funding.

Proposed curriculum

Major work still needed to be done towards developing a curriculum which was one of the planned results.

Feedback from the Leonardo National Agency's visit

Feedback from the National Agency (NA) visitors was positive overall. They noted that the budget appeared UK driven but recognised that all partners had been involved in project activity. The feedback emphasised the role of the piloting and consultation phases in ensuring the course and system is appropriate for representatives of the target group.

The NA wanted to see more partner discussion about internal evaluation and progress of the project. Other points were the need to seek opportunities for sustainability of products and processes and that partners should seek national recognition of the qualification in their countries.

Findings

Were the needs of the target group addressed?

Our research explored if and to what extent VocMat has been addressing the target group's needs, looking at training contents and the different aspects of delivery.

Initially 42 participants were recruited. But as some withdrew from the project further people were taken on board which brought the number up to 69 participants. By end of August 2007 22 people had completed one or more modules.

In addition to the pilot group e-survey we carried out for the final evaluation, partners had collected feedback from participants throughout:

- At the initial workshops that took place at the outset;
- At the meeting in Sheffield;
- Through an electronic questionnaire in October/November 2006 after participants had completed modules 1 and 2;
- Feedback gathering from people who had withdrawn;
- At the meeting in Copenhagen.

Relevance of content

In response to the initial training needs assessment, VocMat partners produced four training modules during the project:

1. Strategic Management
2. Tourism Marketing
3. Human Resources
4. Operations Management.

Feedback from pilot group participants confirmed the training was relevant to them and 87.5% of e-survey respondents found it useful. As the interim evaluation had found, respondents found the Strategic Management module more helpful to personal development than the Marketing module. All respondents had rated Strategic Management as very or quite helpful while 71% rated Marketing the same way.

Learning points from feedback on modules 1 and 2 – to be addressed in modules 3 and 4 – were to

- Include more material directly relevant to the public sector and
- Include more case studies and examples from outside the UK.

Pilot group participants commented favourably on the training covering challenges to tourism businesses from globalisation, environmental issues and competition. They

also named some topics future training could cover. These included team working, accounting and resource planning.

Users like flexibility

VocMat training is delivered using a range of tools and methods, combining face-to-face and distant learning. A Virtual Learning Environment serves as a training platform and offers downloadable module materials, as well as online discussion boards, online chat groups and online submission of assignments. Materials are also available on CD-ROM. Two events with video-conferencing for remote participants brought together pilot group participants for seminars and workshops.

Flexibility is a key aspect of VocMat training which the target group appears to appreciate throughout and on which many have commented positively. All survey respondents found online submission useful. Pilot group participants also liked being able to access study materials in different formats.

A couple of project partners we spoke to suggested improving accessibility further through embedding podcasts and videoed lectures in learning materials.

Flexibility should also apply to the timing of modules. Without the limitations of having to follow a tight schedule for activities as in this pilot phase building in more time flexibility should be easier in the future.

“The learning process has been such that the studies could be undertaken without impacting too greatly on the other aspects of work and family life.” *English pilot group participant*

Approach in Estonia worked best

The analysis of how many pilot group members completed which module and where they came from shows remarkable differences between partner countries, as Figure 2 illustrates:

Figure 2: Analysis of VocMat results

Name of university	Total number of candidates	Number achieving one or more modules	%
Pärnu (Estonia)	22	10	45
RGU (Scotland)	18	5	28
SHU (England)	15	4	27
IST Holar (Iceland)	14	3	21
	69	22	32

(Source: VocMat)

The table shows that almost half (45%) of Estonian participants completed one or more modules while only around one in five from Iceland completed any modules. The figure is also relatively low for the UK at 27% and 28%. Drawing on the evidence from partner interviews possible reasons for the respective completion rates include:

- Estonia targeting participants with higher qualification levels;
- The local tutor in Estonia being a particularly suitable and engaged person who managed to keep learners motivated;
- Language difficulties in Iceland.

The last is likely to be one reason for low completion rates in Iceland. When looking at which modules participants completed, the picture is somewhat different: 3 of 7 Icelandic pilot group members completed module 3 or 4, a conversion rate of 43%. The fact that Iceland led on the development of module 4 is likely to have influenced this.

Partners should do more work on exploring what was different about the Estonian approach of recruiting and supporting pilot group members. Once they have identified these factors they can build on the learning in the future.

Lack of time – or lack of support?

Lack of time has been the main reason for not completing training modules. An analysis of feedback from participants who left the project early found they did so because they had “too much to do at work”, “no time at work” or “no time at home”. But also those who did complete the modules sometimes had problems finding the time to do it. This was contrary to the findings of the initial VocMat research, where respondents had said they could generally undertake training during working hours.

Partly these problems will have occurred because of timing. To be able to develop and test the training modules within the timeframe of the Leonardo project, partners had to stick to a tight schedule. As a result pilot group participants were required to do a lot of their work during the summer period – the busiest time of year in tourism. However, this timing issue is one that can be avoided in future VocMat phases. Partners have learned from the experience and future delivery will be more flexible to take account of industry work patterns.

Which leaves the problem of a general lack of time for working on the modules. Some respondents commented that they needed to spend much more time than they had expected. So it is important that time estimates given are realistic and take account of different circumstances such as participants doing a module in a foreign language. Guidance and promotional materials have to reflect this so that interested learners can be clear about the time required and what exactly is expected from them.

“First I was really eager to get going and started working on the course but then the busy summer period came along and after that the simple goal was to fulfil the requirements.” *Participant from Estonia*

It is notable that the percentage of people working in the public sector who completed one or more modules is higher (42%) than in the private sector (28%). It is likely that work pressures and lack of time are more of a problem in private – especially in small – businesses.

Feedback suggests that in some – if not many - cases the problems with time and work pressure might actually be because of lack of support from within their organisation. Training in a vocational setting by its nature requires that time is available to undertake the training. And this requires that learners have the support from their employers and managers. It is important to also bring employers into the VocMat programme. They need to buy into it and realise what is in it for them. For example, improved skills will make their business more competitive and other staff can benefit from discussions about training topics.

VocMat partners are exploring innovative ways of engaging employers further and encourage them to support participants in the programme. Partners have already agreed that 3-way agreements would be drawn up in future between VocMat, the pilot group member and his/ her line manager or employer.

Role of tutors

An important element of support available to participants within the project is that from subject and local tutors. For each training subject one person from the R&D Group is responsible for answering questions and clarifying issues to do with that particular subject. In addition, participants can turn to a local tutor in each partner country for support.

Responses to the pilot group survey and previous feedback highlighted the importance of this support. But it also suggested that most participants would have liked more support of this kind and that they only found it useful where tutors were actively engaged and gave feedback. They particularly called for more local tutor support.

VocMat partners should consider giving mentoring and tutoring a stronger role in future phases. The approach of having subject and local tutors appears to be working, as long as the right personalities are in place and they actively engage with learners. Introducing face-to-face tutoring at key learning stages is also likely to have a motivating effect.

Discussion board and online chat found less useful

As it is often the case, discussion boards and online chats were underused by VocMat participants. While they are a good idea in theory they rarely work as desired. The VocMat VLE offers a separate discussion board for each module with a range of headings to cover set questions about chapters in modules, IT problems, general issues and so on. The subject leaders regularly checked and responded to questions posted on the boards.

Online chats took place at set dates and times. The module subject leaders led the transnational chats on individual modules. And for “in-country chats” the partner universities organised online chats for participants in their country at certain dates and times.

In a previous survey participants were asked to give their views on different elements of the training system, including online chats and discussions. Feedback suggested that, apart from technical problems some respondents encountered, they did not have or take the time to make use of these facilities. Of respondents to our e-survey, around two thirds found them not useful or a bit useful.

According to the project coordinator online chats worked best in Estonia and survey results confirmed this. Evidence suggests that the engagement and personality of the local tutor made a difference here.

Online tools like discussion boards and chat rooms do have the potential to enhance the learning process but people need good reasons for using them. VocMat participants could be given more exercises for which they have to use these tools, such as group tasks with people in other countries. And subject leaders could encourage dialogue by prompting students with questions of their own. There may be other ways of making these online tools more effective and partners should explore these.

Face-to-face versus online

Distance learning offers a high level of flexibility. But our findings suggest that it needs to be combined with face-to-face contact to avoid negative effects of remote learning. Learners may feel isolated and wish to meet the people who are working through the same things as they are.

VocMat pilot group members confirmed this in their feedback. Some said they would like face-to-face tutorials to discuss issues and concerns. Participants also commented very favourably on the workshop meetings that took place in Sheffield and Copenhagen. Evidence suggests that regular contact with other learners and project people can be motivating.

When early pilot group leavers were asked what could have helped them continue, responses included:

- “possibly more regular contact”;
- “For me to have continued to take part there would have had to be some group sessions to ask questions and get advice”;
- “I wonder if a few tutorials would have helped, possibly they would as I would have been able to discuss issues and concerns.”

We want to mention here that there were two transnational opportunities to meet and at least one per phase in each country (except England).

Getting the balance right between distant and face-to-face contact will be important for the future of the VocMat system and partners should ensure they budget for meetings. They will also need to explore ways of keeping up that balance beyond Leonardo funding and prepare agreements in advance.

Has the project been efficiently administered?

Managing the project

All partners we spoke to agreed that the VocMat project had been very well managed. They recognised the contribution from Tourist Board Training, and the Project Co-ordinator in particular, to the project’s success. On a scale from 1 to 5 – 5 being “very well managed” the eight partners we spoke to gave a rating of at least 4 for how the project was run. Communications seem to have worked well and the

project is on schedule. The major milestones it set out to complete have been completed.

Some delays with claims were caused by a couple of partners not providing management information on time. In fact, TBT had to do a fair amount of chasing throughout the project to get the required information. The project has also been experiencing some budget problems. Building on the lessons from this pilot phase of VocMat, the budget needs more flexibility and control for dealing with under-and over-spends by individual partners and more explicit links between partner performance and receipt of funding

We also want to flag up a couple of financial complications the project experienced. To work more cost effectively, block bookings were made for travel and accommodation for meetings. But this caused problems with individual partners' understanding of their budget allocations later. It also meant TBT had to keep additional records to ensure that it was clear TBT had made payments but costs were allocated against partners' budgets.

Also for cost effectiveness reasons, some partner meetings were held at the same time as other European meetings connected to EUTO. The National Agency agreed that partners could charge a proportion of costs to VocMat but this required a lot of justification and increased the administrative burden.

Budget control by individual partners should be built into any future phases of VocMat.

Systems and mechanisms

Evidence from the systems audit and partner interviews confirmed that the systems and mechanisms the project has developed are well designed and work well.

Division of tasks

Partners commented favourably on the clear division of tasks between the different working groups. The remit of the R&D Group, for example, does not include any project management tasks. And the way meetings were planned and organised meant groups did not have to sit through lengthy discussions that did not concern them directly. This way of working saved time and gave groups the opportunity to focus on the outcomes of their particular area. The success of this structure is a clear learning point the project should build on in future.

Administrative system

Partners provide monitoring information to the lead partner TBT on a quarterly basis. Information on expenditure provided in languages other than English has caused some delays in the past as it had to be returned for translation.

TBT processes the information by work package:

- Project management / Administration/ Finance
- Quality management
- Research and development
- Valorisation

- Delivery and testing.

Before each meeting partners receive feedback from TBT so they can have an informed discussion of the situation at the meeting. At the heart of the system is the milestones chart (or project management log) in which project management logs activities and progress by work package. The chart was developed from the original work plan in response to the feedback from the Leonardo NA visit. The NA wanted to see more discussion about internal evaluation and the project management log facilitates this. It also serves as an issues log.

The administrative system has been continuously reviewed and improved during the course of the project. For example, the claims system became more user-friendly when five different forms were replaced by one spreadsheet.

Language and translation

Where partners from different countries work together language issues have to be dealt with. The situation was compounded by the fact that more materials were produced than originally anticipated. Having to translate training materials and other documents can be expensive and possibly cause time delays. For example, translating materials into Icelandic is particularly expensive. There is a good case for setting more money aside in the budget for translations, especially since more translation will be necessary in the future. Following discussion with the Leonardo National Agency near the end of the project partners agreed that materials would be translated into partner languages prior to a module being delivered. This will give participants the opportunity to complete modules in their own language if they wish.

Cooperation and partnership

There is clear evidence that this transnational partnership has been working well. All partners we spoke to have felt involved in the project and thought that partners had been working together well. They particularly liked the transnational aspect which they found “inspiring” and “innovative”. One of the positive effects a couple of partners mentioned was that relationships developed between academia and industry which have helped breaking down preconceptions. The partnership had to prove how well they worked together when they had to resolve the problems with the valorisation sub-contractor. We will comment on this in the section on valorisation.

There were also personal gains through networking and developing new contacts. One interviewee commented that the learning curve had been very steep for partners. To date partners have met seven times in different locations.

However, our research also found a clear imbalance of workloads. TBT as the lead partner did most of the work. The key contacts from TBT and TMI highlighted this and other partners recognised it in their interviews. A side effect of this was that the project was perceived as having a strong UK focus. The National Agency feedback report, for example, stated in terms of budget the project appeared to be driven by the promoter and UK partners. Overall, Iceland appears to have been the weakest link.

The more active partners have learned from this experience. According to the Project Co-ordinator there would be an additional formal agreement between

partners in future, explaining in detail what was expected of them and developed by partners together. It would involve sanctions for not meeting responsibilities.

Other key issues

Innovation

There are different perspectives as to how innovative VocMat is. In Estonia, for instance, where there was a lack of tourism training programmes, tourism management training being available at all is considered innovative. In the UK, combination of distance and face-to-face learning in tourism management training is innovative as it provides “a new way of doing things”, as one partner commented. Tools to deliver VocMat training, such as online assessments and video conferencing are also innovative. And feedback from partners suggested there was scope for further innovation through embedding podcasts and videoed lectures in learning materials.

But the most innovative aspect is the transnationality, that is partners from different countries working together to develop and test a training system. Evidence suggests that all involved hold this international component in high regard. People in general tend to find working and exchanging experience with people from other countries attractive. And qualifications gained in an international context also appear more attractive.

The potential contact with learners from other countries is a key selling point of VocMat training and it is also likely to be what can make it attractive to other sectors. So one key question for the future is how to maintain it as a transnational qualification and build on it. It will be important to keep people’s interest in it and develop and embed the idea in the future.

Qualification and accreditation

The baseline report stated the VocMat system should develop accreditation for the training modules and explore the European Credit Transfer Scheme. And the feedback from the Leonardo NA visit commented partners should seek national recognition of the qualification in their countries.

Evidence from partner interviews suggests that all the higher education establishments in the partnership have integrated the VocMat modules in their programmes. The modules gain credits towards national qualifications and an equivalent of 7.5 credit points each from the European Credit Transfer System. Partners are now exploring ways of developing a European level qualification. These activities have contributed towards making tourism qualifications more transparent, which is a Leonardo priority.

Although these achievements are a step in the right direction, partners have to think carefully about the real value of the qualification. The questions to consider are:

- Does participation in the project make people more attractive to employers than those who haven’t trained through VocMat?
- Are the qualifications seen as having sufficient value to individuals *and* employers?
- If not, what could be done to make them more transferable?

One of the planned results is a qualifications curriculum. Partners have done some work on this. At the Copenhagen meeting they drew up a matrix of skills areas against potential training modules, as in Figure 3 below

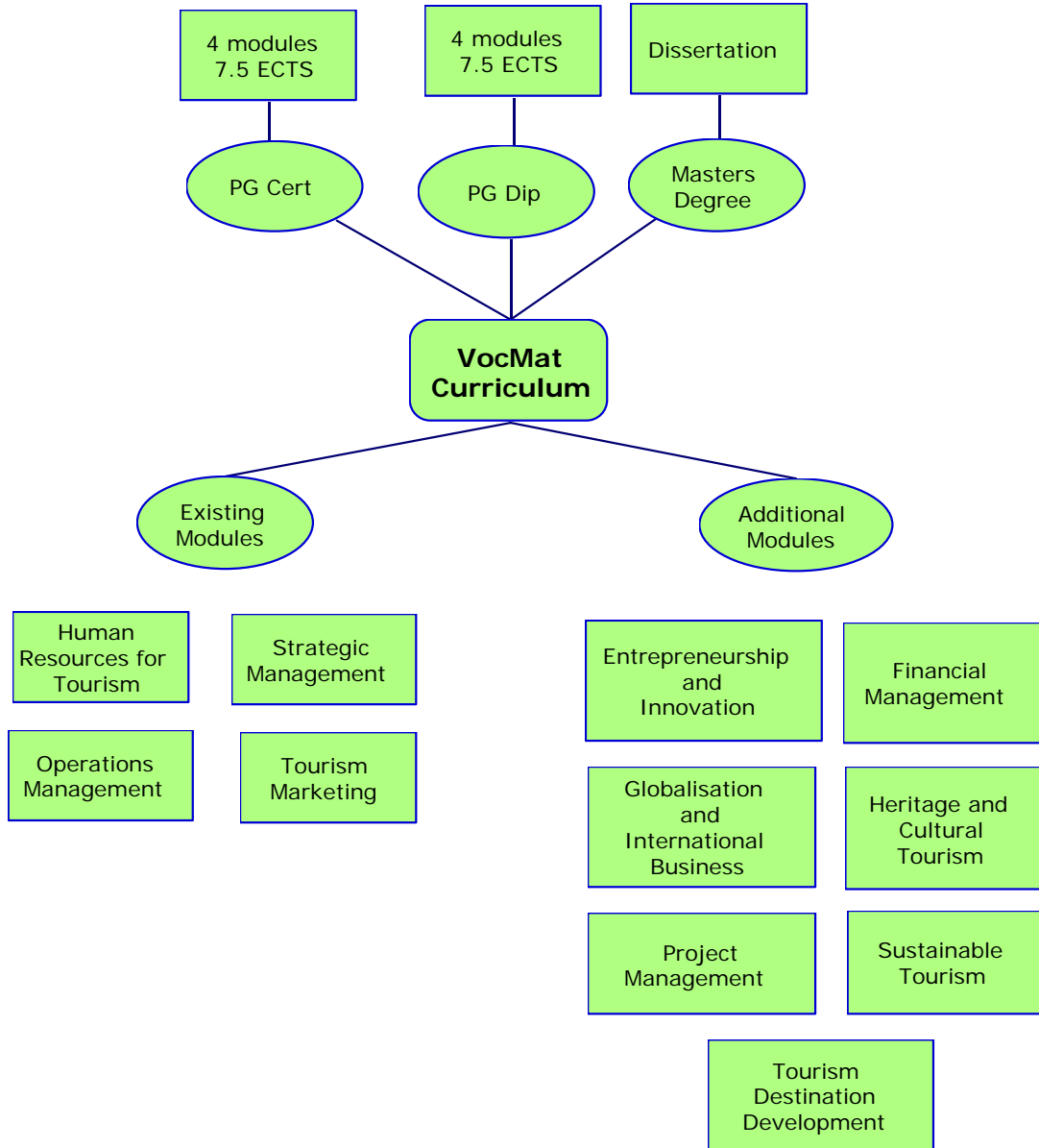
Figure 3: VocMat curriculum content matrix

	Product development	Finance management	Quality issues	Communications	Management skills
Cooperation with stakeholders	X			X	X
Partnership working	X		X	X	X
Time management	X	X			X
Fundraising	X	X			
Project management	X	X		X	X
Entrepreneurship/innovation	X				
Sales management		X			
Yield management		X			
Sustainable tourism	X		X	X	X
Customer service			X	X	X
Cultural diversity	X		X	X	X
Heritage/ cultural tourism	X		X	X	
Crisis management	X	X	X	X	X
Marketing communication			X	X	X
Seasonality	X	X			
Study skills					X

(Source: VocMat)

And the model in Figure 4 overleaf illustrates the new curriculum partners have produced as a result of their work.

Figure 4: VocMat Curriculum



(Source: VocMat)

To progress the curriculum and qualifications further as the project progresses, further research needs to be done to find out how VocMat participants have put their learning into practice and what difference it has made in their organisation. The project coordinator also commented there should be some way of assessing people’s management skills in the workplace in order to develop an additional assessment with credits attached to it.

Sustainability

Partners have been exploring ways of making the project sustainable after Leonardo funding ends. Considerations have ranged from bringing additional universities on board to commercialising project results. As a result of valorisation activities they have noted increased interest from potential users.

One partner from TMI drafted a series of options for the way forward in making VocMat sustainable which she circulated to the other partners seeking their views. In addition to an intellectual property rights agreement (IPR), partners needed to consider a number of aspects:

- Who administers the VLE after the Leonardo project and where will the funding come from?
- Who will coordinate subject materials and assessment task updates?
- How will partners ensure quality control of assessments? and
- How will they reconcile flexibility of access with partner availability for support and marking assessments?

According to the project coordinator partners have already agreed that VocMat would continue to be available, but the above questions need to be answered. They will also have to assess potential risks, such as key contacts leaving the project.

The interest from potential end users in participating in a Transfer of Innovation application, building on this VocMat project, proved the relevance of the VocMat product. Specifically, interest was received from universities and tourism organisations in Italy, Spain, Latvia and from universities in Finland and Turkey.

Valorisation

Despite some delays because of issues with valorisation, there is evidence that all partners have undertaken a lot of valorisation activities. The partnership had sub-contracted a sub-contractor for valorisation. Following an interim review, the contract was ended and partners shared valorisation responsibilities between them for the remaining period. This was an opportunity to show how strong the partnership was and partners managed the change in approach collectively – and they seem to have handled it well.

Like the other work packages, valorisation activities are recorded in the valorisation section of the milestone chart. According to this and interviews with project coordinator and partners, all partners had met their responsibilities to date. Throughout the project, partners have been receiving quarterly updates on valorisation. A central tool is the valorisation database with more than 1,000 relevant contacts. Partners submitted all their contacts to TBT who pulled them together in a database that is continuously revised and updated. More recently, the project coordinator carried out web searches to identify additional potential end users. These have been used for targeted dissemination activities of project results

Another central tool is the VocMat website¹ which has been developed and upgraded during the life of the project.

¹ www.vocmat.com

A review of the valorisation strategy found that press releases had been more effective than newsletters as dissemination tools. As a result, partners amended the approach to issue more press releases (10 instead of 6) and fewer newsletters (3 instead of 8).

The project produced promotional leaflets at the start and the end, which were printed in English, Estonian and Icelandic.

The networks available to partners through the European Union of Tourist Officers (EUTO) and the European Travel and Tourism Action Group (ETAG) were used extensively to promote the project. This resulted in coverage by organisations such as the International Road Transport Union who are ETAG members.

The project was also promoted through www.theparliament.com and the Parliament Magazine, the EU publication and news service. It also appears in the European Projects Forum².

The European Tourism Unit in Brussels suggested for VocMat to apply to participate in the Best Practice Exhibition being staged as part of the European Tourism Forum and the annual meeting of Ministers of Tourism from EU Member States. Participation is very competitive as there are only a few exhibition places. The VocMat project was selected as the only education and training project and one of only seven exhibition places across Europe.

Other valorisation activities were:

- Presentations by all partners to organisations in their countries;
- Presentations at relevant meetings at EU level, such as the meeting of EU tourism ministers in March 2006;
- Bulletins on various websites;
- Email campaigns;
- Promotion at EUTO study visits.

² www.projectforum.eu

Conclusion and recommendations

VocMat partners set out to develop an innovative training system for tourism managers across Europe to address an identified need. The main purpose of this evaluation is to establish if project results are what the European tourism industry really needs. And – being a pilot project – what partners can do to meet industry needs most effectively in the future. Drawing on the available evidence we can confirm that VocMat has been successful in addressing identified needs of the target group, partners have built a strong partnership and the project has been managed very well.



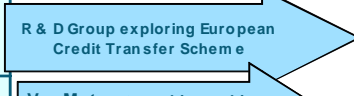
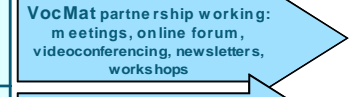
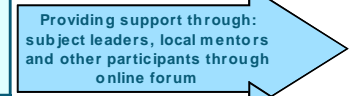
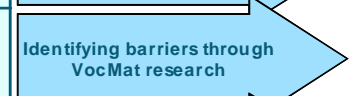

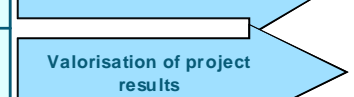
Training content seems relevant and users like the flexibility the system offers. Both aspects could be further developed – the contents through the curriculum partners have developed, and delivery through improving support structures, such as tutor support and online communication tools. For the future success of the model it will be important to get the balance right between distant and face-to-face contact between learners, and between learners and support staff – and budget for this.

VocMat provides training content and flexibility, but users have to bring in the right level of commitment. And employers have to buy into it to make it successful. To achieve that, the message valorisation activities get across has to be right and build on the real strengths of the VocMat system. A key selling point should be the innovative international component. This is an attractive aspect – not only for potential participants and employers, but also to potential end users in sectors related to tourism. Partners should ensure the international component remains strong when they decide on the way forward for making VocMat sustainable.

Although the partnership has worked well – particularly the division of tasks among the working groups - a formal agreement on day-to-day administration, finance and responsibilities should ensure a better balance of workloads in the future.

Figure 5 overleaf recalls the baseline situation and summarises VocMat outcomes based on the findings of this evaluation.

Figure 5: VocMat

Baseline situation	VocMat activity	Desired outcome at end of VocMat project (2007)	Outcome as desired?
<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>Yes, and there is scope for further developing content in the context of the new curriculum</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>Yes, but delivery could be improved further through flexible timing, making better use of discussion boards and online chats</p>
<p>Lack of recognised qualifications</p>	 <p>R & D Group exploring European Credit Transfer Scheme</p>	<p>Accreditation of training modules</p>	<p>Yes, recognition at partner universities and through ECTS achieved, now working towards European qualification</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>Yes, strong transnational partnership with links to other 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>Yes, but further work needs to be done: more tutor support and better balance between face-to-face and distance learning</p>
<p>Low utilisation of available training</p>	 <p>Identifying barriers through VocMat research</p>	<p>Awareness of barriers</p>	<p>Yes, but now explore ways of engaging employers</p>
<p>Gaps in existing research</p>	 <p>Research of Research & Development Group</p>	<p>Innovative products meeting identified demand</p>	<p>Yes, now undertake further research to support curriculum</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>Effective valorisation activities are likely to improve this</p>

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