IT:BSE
Building Service Engineering

Kick Off Meeting – Köln, 21-24.10.2012
Highlights of the first evaluation survey

Report prepared by **E C A P** Research & Development

1. Introduction

This short report is based on the results of the first on-line evaluation survey, realized immediately after the meeting aiming at:
- collecting reactions and remarks of participants, related to the quality and achievements of the meeting (first part of the survey, 10 initial questions, and SWOT remarks)
- trying to identify some more general issues and challenges with which the Consortium is expected to deal with during the 2 years of lifespan of the project.

Nine partners' representatives filled in the questionnaire. All the partner countries are represented in the survey (4 representatives from Germany, the other from Spain, Bulgaria and Finland).

The report presents very shortly – in an anonymous way - the overall results of the survey, providing the project leader, and the whole partnership, with some hints and suggestions finalized at improving project management and detailed planning of activities during the next months.

2. Indicators concerning the Meeting

Fig.1 – a satisfactory meeting: average scores for the 10 initial questions (min.1 – max. 4)
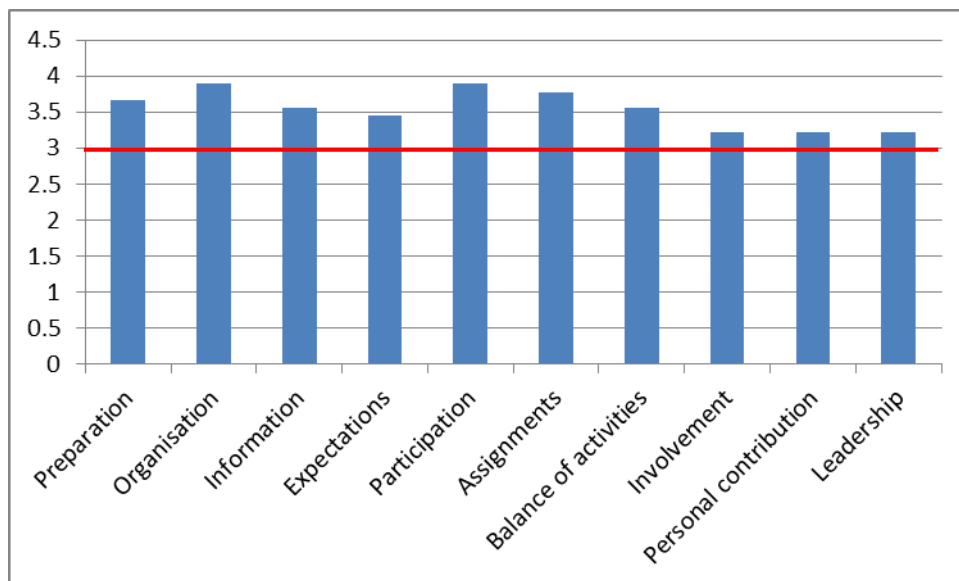
The graph clearly highlights that no items scored as an average less than a satisfactory result ("quite good", corresponding to level 3). Preparation and management of the meeting have been particularly appreciated, as well as the sensitivity of the project leader in taking in account preoccupations and expectations of the partners. Assignments and tasks of each partner, looking for the next steps, seem now to be clear (a very important achievement in every kick off meeting, to be carefully monitored during the next months).

A couple of "insufficient" notes has been given to the leadership attitude of the coordinator (but we should bear in mind that a more "conductive" leadership normally hampers participation), and to the "differentiated" commitment of the partners in the project (only one remark, not to be considered a real alarm bell).

Strong points (excerpts from open answers)

➔ **a good preparatory work and a good management of the meeting**: Work previously done by the organization of the meeting, Excellent project and previous work, Perfect organization of the meeting and the whole stay in Cologne; friendly atmosphere and good relationship between the partners; excellent presentation of the project to the partners, thus we have a clear idea about the project aims, transparency atmosphere, Good organization, relevant information on the project, good balance of different activities…

➔ **evidence of clear tasks to be developed during the next months** (Q6): all partners got general understanding of the project aims and the way to reach the aims, Agreement about the structure of the matrix , Agreement about the timeline

➔ **a good and articulated partnership, ready to work together** (different points of view taken in account, commitment…) – Level and diversity of the participating partners, Idea and future prospects of the projects, friendly and helpful atmosphere flexible organization of the program participation of all partners during the meeting, good spirit all are interested in the project is proceeding

Weak points:

➔ practically none, except for some doubts about the possibility of developing complex deliverables – such as preparing a questionnaire, setting up a common matrix, etc. - working together during transnational meetings (due to time limits and constraints characterizing them, at least if the duration is limited to a couple of days). One remark about different levels of engagement and contribution by the partners, one remark about the length of a couple of presentations.


3. IT:BSE and the EU mainstream tools

As an EU funded initiative, IT:BSE Project addresses the priority of the LLP Call to which it refers (2012), and in this case is expected to focus on the ***EQF and ECVET tools as means to fostering transparency and transferability of qualifications*** acquired in a European context to another one. On the other hand, as a Transfer of Innovation project, IT:BSE is based on a ***previous innovation (the VQTS Model) to be valued and transferred*** to reach the above mentioned aim. In addition, the partners joined the Consortium on the basis of their ***specific expectations***, for sure correlated to the possibility of ***strengthening an existing and well-tuned cooperative network*** between them, already active ***in the field of exchange and mobility***. The success of a project like this largely depends on the balance that will be reached, since the beginning, between these different goals.

Therefore we devoted a part of our on-line survey to analyze a set of questions correlated to that balance: to which extent the partners think that IT:BSE deliverables should be strictly related to the adoption of a common glossary and a philosophy coherent with EQF and ECVET descriptors (learning outcomes, units, credits allocated to units…)? To which extent they consider the VQTS Model as a transferable and valuable solution? Furthermore, are the expectations of the partners respected by the project outline, and are they in line with the priorities selected by the project?

Answers show that basically the partners share common points of view about potentialities and limits of EU mainstream tools. As far as they interested to develop common qualification pathways, aiming at enhancing mobility between countries and organizations as a means to learn, they are mainly *looking for tools facilitating the recognition and transfer of learning outcomes*. ECVET should represent the right solution for improving the effectiveness of training pathways based on mobility, but responses show that only 50% of respondents (fig. 2) totally agree on that. That means that a half of them still have clear doubts: 37.5% don't consider ECVET a mandatory fundamental solution, and one respondent doesn't establish at all a link between the recognition and accreditation of learning outcomes and ECVET.

Fig. 2 – ECVET as a means for facilitating transfer and recognition of learning outcomes of mobilities
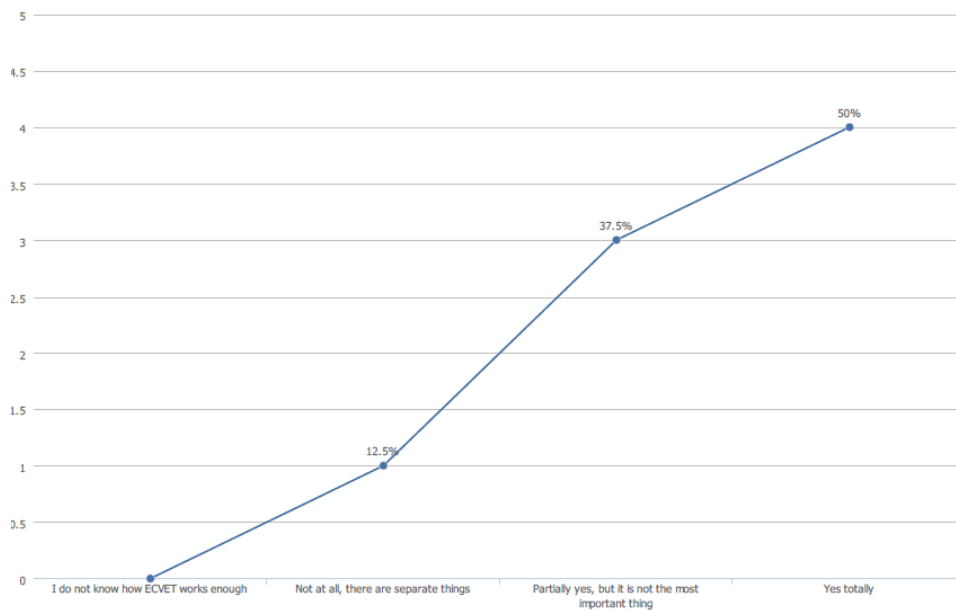
Importance assigned to mobility as a means to learn is growing, but features and solutions provided by ECVET for valuing learning outcomes are not always convincing. More in general consensus on Credit Systems seems to be very differentiated between partners and countries (fig. 3)
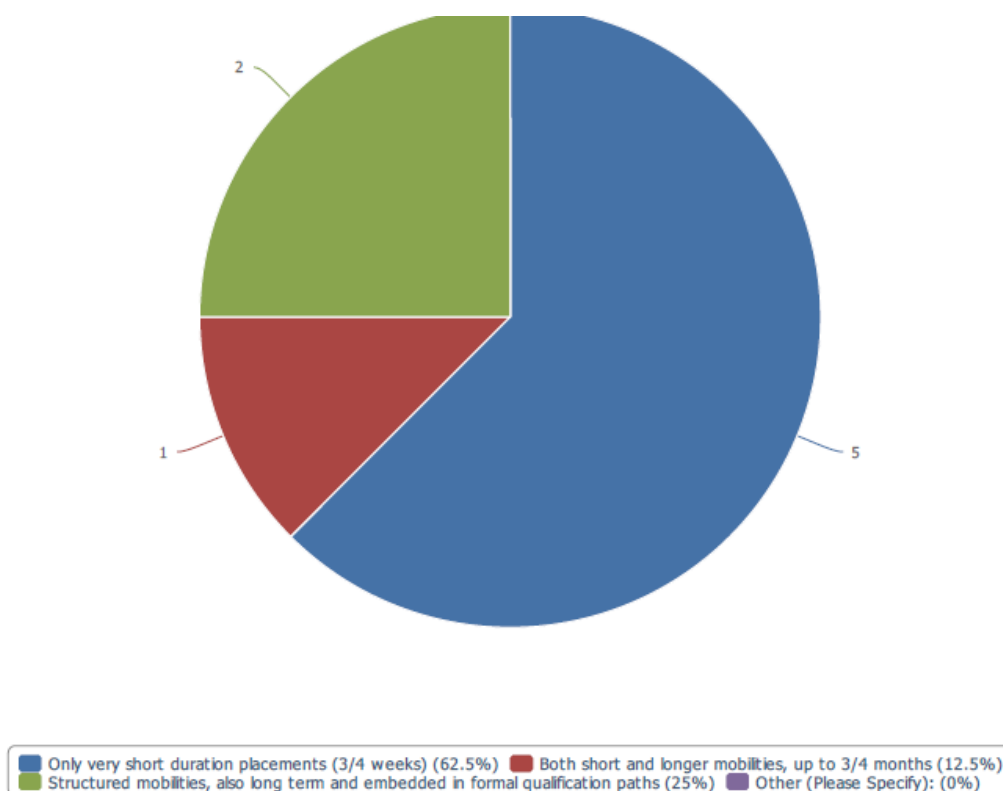
Fig. 3 – Consensus about the possibility of accreditation of learning outcomes of mobilities through a Credit System
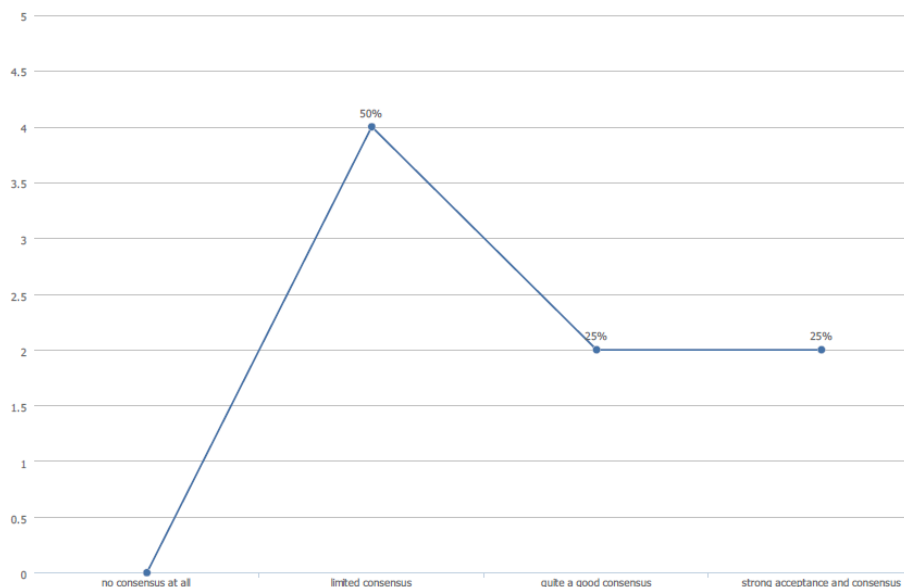
The great majority admits that a certain consensus exist in each country, but 50% of respondents judge it still limited, and only a quarter speaks of a strong acceptance. System based on accreditation of learning outcomes acquired during mobility projects seem to be more accepted by training centers and sometimes by companies, than by other relevant stakeholders, such as in Germany the Chambers of Commerce, in charge of delivering qualifications. Traditional qualification systems, socially and economically recognized by the Member States, confirm to be a powerful braking factor in expanding the European dimension of VET.

Opinions are rather divergent also considering the possibility of exploiting and valuing the results of a Mobility project. Respondents think that the value of these learning outcomes have to be spent both considering the job market and the VET system. For half of them, however, achievements of mobilities should be considered more important for improving "employability" of mobile learners, than for letting them gain a qualification. At the opposite another half consider mobility more a good means for reaching a recognized / official qualification than for improving individual chances of occupation. Although in general the feeling about mobility as a means for learning is rather positive (not only something "nice to have", but a powerful learning driver), the issue of valuing mobility seems to be a bit controversial and open, probably as a consequence of difficulties still encountered in order to develop mobility beyond the limits of short term work experiences. Still the great majority of the partners (fig. 4) hardly imagine the possibility of organizing structured mobilities, as a key component of a qualification pathway.

Fig. 4 – Which kind of mobilities are sustainable and realistic to be organized?

Only very short duration placements (3/4 weeks) (62.5%) ■ Both short and longer mobilities, up to 3/4 months (12.5%)
Structured mobilities, also long term and embedded in formal qualification paths (25%) ■ Other (Please Specify): (0%)

In any case all respondents think that learning outcomes achieved through mobility, both formal and informal ones, should be valued and for this purpose should be assessed in an affordable and reliable way. Valuation and when possible accreditation of learning outcomes of a Mobility project should be realized assuring a summative assessment by a third party, in order to let certification gain an adequate value; this evaluation should be prepared and integrated by a self-evaluation, developed for formative purposes by the learners, accompanied by the trainers. 8 on 9 respondents share this opinion.

4. The VQTS Matrix as a Model, and the expectations of the partners

IT:BSE Project is based on a previous innovation, and particularly aims at exploiting the VQTS Model for reaching its purposes. We asked participants to evaluate in general the usability and the added value provided by the VQTS Matrix, for reaching the general goals of the project and more specifically to assure results coherent with the operative objectives corresponding to interests and expectations of the members of the Consortium. As far as the value of the VQTS Model is concerned items and results are summarized by fig. 5.

Fig. 5 – Added value provided by the VQTS Model in order to reach project goals

	I don't know the Model enough	Poor	Limited	Quite good	Very good, with a full added value	Average Score
Value of the Matrix for defining a learning outcomes oriented profile	0 (0.00%)	0 (0.00%)	0 (0.00%)	**6 (75.00%)**	2 (25.00%)	4.25 / 5 (85.00%)
Definition of units of learning corresponding to steps of development of single competences	0 (0.00%)	0 (0.00%)	0 (0.00%)	**6 (75.00%)**	2 (25.00%)	4.25 / 5 (85.00%)
Usefulness in order to compare VET paths	1 (12.50%)	0 (0.00%)	1 (12.50%)	**6 (75.00%)**	0 (0.00%)	3.50 / 5 (70.00%)
Usefulness in order to plan effective mobilities	0 (0.00%)	0 (0.00%)	2 (25.00%)	2 (25.00%)	**4 (50.00%)**	4.25 / 5 (85.00%)
Usefulness in order to assess learning outcomes	0 (0.00%)	0 (0.00%)	0 (0.00%)	**5 (62.50%)**	3 (37.50%)	4.38 / 5 (87.60%)

Results are quite satisfactory. Partners at least "declare" a good knowledge and understanding of the Model (some partners were already familiar with the same approach, but we should also take in account that misunderstandings are always round the corner, and could come to the fore during the next meetings!). Results are satisfactory also considering the expectations of the partners towards the most important features of the Model; in general these expectations are positive, even if some question marks arise, and they will deserve a careful monitoring during the next steps of the project. Partners mainly focuses on the Model as a means for:

- defining profiles in a more flexible and articulated way, suitable for organizing mobilities, using learning outcomes descriptors, designing steps of "incremental development" of competences, usable for better planning mobilities (but 2 of respondents don't really trust that VQTS could provide a real added value at this scope)
- preparing a good assessment of learning outcomes.

They are less interested, and trustful, when another "pillar" of the Model comes to the fore: the possibility of using the VQTS Matrix to enhance mutual understanding between VET systems, by comparing qualification pathways. This doesn't mean that IT:BSE Consortium members are underestimating the relevance of defining a shared profile. Probably expectations are a bit diverse, moving from more ambitious (building up a new "Euro-compatible" qualification) to more realistic ones, focusing above all on approaches and tools useful to build

up common learning pathways, improving and managing short term mobilities (as far as they are actually organizers of such learning experiences).

From this point of view, the project is really facing at least two challenges:

- the first one correlated to the design and implementation of a qualification path in line with an emerging "vision" of the life cycle of building activities; characterized by a strong integration between planning, construction, management and demolition / requalification phases (this innovative approach is largely shared and considered coherent by almost all the partners, but levels and possibilities of implementation of such an approach seem to be very differentiated in the partner countries)
- the second one refers to the opportunity of strengthening the network already linking many of Consortium members, by developing a transnational training path in the same field, including some structured learning experiences (modules) based on mobility projects.

These 2 challenges are clearly focused by fig. 6.

Fig. 6 - which results are you expecting by the project?

	Not interested at all	Not the most relevant issue for us	Interested	Very much interested	Average Score
I'm interested to contribute at the definition of a shared profile based on the VQTS Matrix	0 (0.00%)	1 (12.50%)	3 (37.50%)	**4 (50.00%)**	3.38 / 4 (84.50%)
I would like to build up a common training pathway	0 (0.00%)	0 (0.00%)	**4 (50.00%)**	**4 (50.00%)**	3.50 / 4 (87.50%)
I would like to define a common certification (qualification)	0 (0.00%)	0 (0.00%)	**4 (50.00%)**	**4 (50.00%)**	3.50 / 4 (87.50%)
I would like to consolidate the network with the other partners	0 (0.00%)	0 (0.00%)	**4 (50.00%)**	**4 (50.00%)**	3.50 / 4 (87.50%)
I'm interested to improve mobility projects in this professional area	0 (0.00%)	0 (0.00%)	**4 (50.00%)**	**4 (50.00%)**	3.50 / 4 (87.50%)
I would like to define a shared way to assess and mutually recognize the results (learning outcomes) of mobilities	0 (0.00%)	0 (0.00%)	3 (37.50%)	**5 (62.50%)**	3.63 / 4 (90.75%)

Expectations are dramatically high, and they are addressed both to improve the quality and the accountability of mobilities, and to design and implement a common qualification path, in an emerging profile, already piloted in some regions in Germany but brand new in the other countries. On the other hand, beyond the wide range of expectations shared by the partners, the survey confirm that a common set of key aims could be found anchoring the project above all to the definition of a "shared way to assess and mutually recognize the results (learning

outcomes) of mobilities". It implies sharing a vision of how work processes and roles can be used for describing and articulating competences and competence development steps.

5. Summing up: some remarks and warnings

Summing up, and considering more in general the characteristics of the project, we would like to conclude our initial (ex-ante) evaluative report with a couple of short remarks, including some warnings, related to key points to be carefully considered by managing the project.

IT:BSE is a **well structured project**, promoted by an **experienced** and well rooted coordinator, counting on an **articulated network** of local VET institutions. The innovation to be transferred (the VQTS Model) is based on a **rigorous and affordable procedure**, already exploited by the coordinator in the framework of another ToI project in a different sector (TRIFT). The Consortium is based on a **core membership**, already experienced and committed in organizing exchanges and mobilities, hosting some new partners (Bulgaria) moving in a transition space from a traditional to a renewed VET landscape, interested to profiting of the solid experience of the coordinating country for designing some innovative VET profiles. The project deals with an **emerging professional role**, well related to the evolution of the construction sector towards sustainability and new quality standards. The project is **deeply anchored and well situated in a specific context**, defined by the German qualification system, moving step by step during the recent years forward, in order to match EU requirements in the field of articulation and structure of the VET pathways. These factors should be considered as **strengths of the project**, but they make visible also some **challenges and risks**, deserving to be remembered:

- The project is well contextualized, many expectations are clearly rooted in the German system (and it's an obvious case, in a Transfer of Innovation initiative) but **the European dimension should be at the same time kept in mind**, in order to safeguard involvement and mutual understanding between the partners (and in order to reach coherent results in terms of dissemination and valorization)
- The Consortium is based on an articulated and experienced partnership, but in any case **expectations and levels of commitment are not always convergent**; some partners assign more relevance to issues related to enhance the solidity of their mobility network, other are more focusing on the development of new qualification pathways deriving from the Model to be piloted
- The Model to be transferred already proved to be effective for achieving many of the goals focused by the project, but at the same time **IT:BSE faces a "double challenge" (setting up a new qualification and fostering mobility as a means to build up correlated competences)** probably requiring efforts and time investments overcoming time and resources provided by the project to be won;
- in any case, focusing on the role of mobility as a means to learn, **it makes no sense to reinvent once again the wheel**, because many experiences have already been developed in this field, and we **can already count on methods, approaches and tools that proved to be effective in order to improve in a sustainable way mobilities**, both planning structured work experiences and valuing informal learning opportunities always produced by a work experience abroad.

These warnings can be translated in some suggestions:

- **The European dimension should be constantly enhanced fostering and facilitating the interaction between the partners in the preparation and validation of deliverables** (assigning tasks and distributing responsibilities between the partners could be a good solution to avoid the risk of a disengagement of some institutions);

- also **replacing the Belgian partner**, who resigned, with a solid and experienced organization capable of bringing sound and dialectic points of view to the Consortium, should be of the utmost importance, in order to avoid an exclusively "German centered" implementation of the project
- A **good balance between the 2 key challenges** (designing the profile and improving mobilities) should be pursued, differentiating aims and operative objectives between areas; actually the **second aim seems to be more important, and sustainable, at least if we look at the European dimension**; the definition of a qualification profile and of a common qualification path could be kept in the background and better reconsidered under the lens of the VQTS approach: focusing on the definition of a **common Matrix**, essential to plan mobilities but easy to be used by all interested bodies for building up "EQF coherent" qualifications, fitting in the meanwhile national qualification frameworks
- **considering the implementation of high quality mobilities, based on methods and tools for planning and assessing learning outcomes, IT:BSE should finally draw on useful lessons learnt in some recent initiatives,** based on the same innovative Model and facing similar problems, even if in different VET sectors (we could mention once again the TRIFT project, led by the same coordinator, as well as ECMO or other Transfer of Innovation initiatives based on the VQTS Model – see www.vocationalqualifications.net)

Furio Bednarz, January 2013