



Digital International Trainers (DIG.INT)

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Guidelines for the use of the Internationalisation

Benchmarking System

Work package 2

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1. Introduction: Why to Read These Guidelines

Vocational Education and Training and Technical Higher Education have different approaches and experiences concerning internationalisation. In Higher Education the Bologna Process has deeply affected every institution and internationalisation is mainly focused on student mobility, a common credit system and research collaboration. For VET providers, in average, the experience in international mobility and international research is less developed, while internationalisation is more associated to the access to innovation skills and joint training programmes responding to the needs of a labour market that, although still mostly regional, is evolving in the direction of a globalised economy, with common challenges and trends. If your organisation, be it a VET provider or a Higher Education Institution with a strong labour market orientation, is interested to check what is the present state of its internationalisation process, the Benchmarking System developed by DIG.INT will allow you to do so in a simple and immediate way. You will be able to compare your organisation with other organisations (similar and less similar, but always inspiring) and explore new ways to “internationalise” your training programmes and organisational profile in ways that maybe you never considered before.

However, answering the benchmarking questionnaire is not the only step that is advised if you want to get the best outcomes out of the exercise: it can help you in analysing the present performance of your organisation, establishing new objectives for internationalisation, finding local and international partners with which to collaborate (mobility of students and teachers, international study programmes, virtual mobility, international internships, joint research projects, cultural exchanges, language exchange programmes, participation in international conferences etc.).

This short document will explain how to extract value from the benchmarking exercise.

2. Why Benchmarking in the DIGINT Project

The general purpose of the DIG.INT Project is to support VET providers and technical HEIs to make a quality leap in their internationalisation strategy - while they all face the digital transition that affects not only their education/training programmes contents but also the way they design, deliver and assess learning - by comparing their objectives, their approaches, their achievements and their open questions. That is why a Benchmarking, i.e. structured comparison based on agreed indicators, had to be part of the project. Learning by comparison is a basic process for human beings and for organisations, it stimulates self-reflection and innovation, and may lead, if other conditions are present, to long-term partnership based on mutual interest. For example, VET providers may learn to manage student mobility better by adopting some practices that are already consolidated in the HE system, or HEIs may learn to work better abroad with the local employers by adopting some professional development

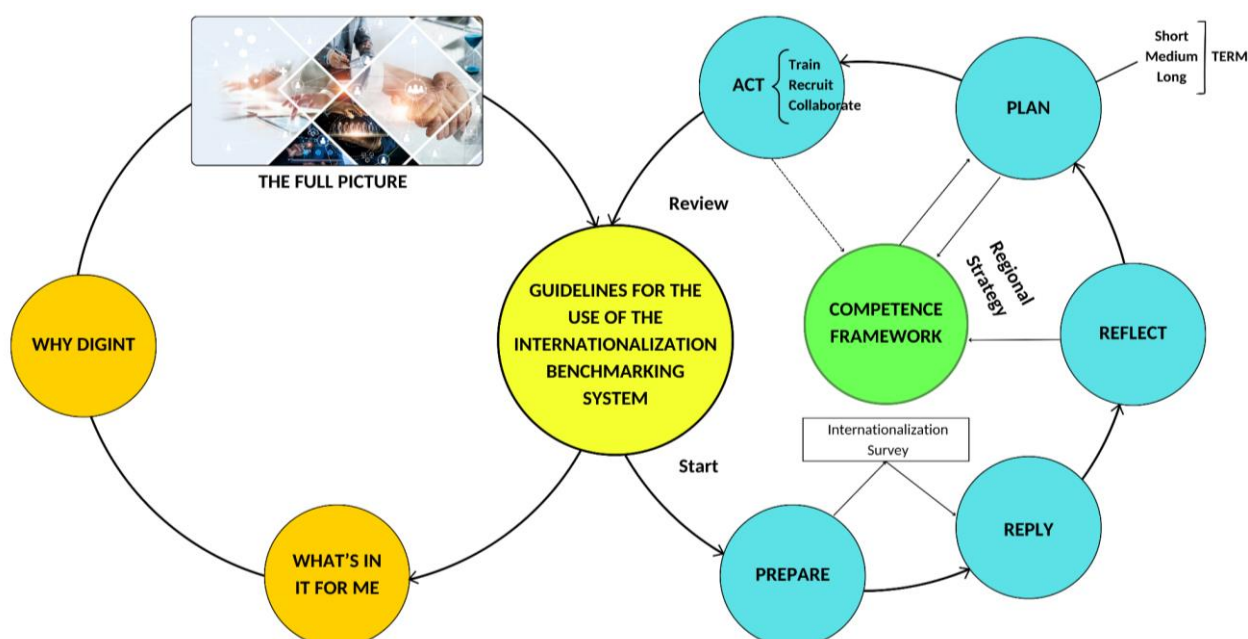
practices that are already in place by the most advanced VET providers. More frequently, comparing with similar organisations in different countries will provide ideas on internationalisation perspectives.

3. The Full Picture

DIG.INT does not consist of Benchmarking only:

1. It has explored the internationalisation profile of its own project partners and has developed an internationalisation survey that allows more descriptive and open questions, and a reporting format, both mostly for “internal use”, that allow the internationalisation team to describe and reflect on its trajectory and its present objectives in this field.
2. It has developed a competence framework allowing to reflect on which competence are available and which are missing for individuals, but also for the whole organisation, thus helping to design training programme and/or to define recruitment priorities in relation to the strategic objectives and to the immediate needs.
3. It is also developing innovative learning paths - using the Competence Framework - adapted to the needs of teachers/trainers/tutors, managers of education/training institutions, and major stakeholders/decision makers at the regional level, all corresponding to the needs assessed and the co-design work of the project partners.

The following picture gives an idea of how the full process is working, and also corresponds to the structure of these Guidelines: on the left side you find the sections that we have already developed together, on the right side you find the process that we suggest to run while approaching the whole DIG.INT Benchmarking activity, that is the step-by-step description of the activities that the DIG.INT Consortium suggests to get the maximum benefit from this exercise.



4. Who Should Participate?

Benchmarking is not an individual exercise, it requires that several people (top managers, international team, some representatives of teachers, students, maybe also employers, local authorities) concerned with the international activities are confronted/questioned in the preparatory activity and have a say on how well the organisation is doing on the different areas that the preliminary internationalisation survey and the benchmarking questionnaire are addressing. This participation may also lead to clarify objectives and to discard some sections or indicators that are not considered as relevant for the organisation characteristics or for the specific context (e.g. the regional smart specialisation strategy).

5. The Preparation Phase

As mentioned above, the DIG.INT Partners went through a validation exercise in which they answered and revised a long questionnaire, including a long list of quantitative and qualitative/descriptive questions on their internationalisation strategy, their concrete activities, their objectives and their achievements. After a substantial simplification process, their number was drastically reduced and the structure of the questionnaire was slightly revised in view of a standardised reporting. The report generated by the questionnaire is now the basis for the preparation phase that is proposed to the newcomers in the DIG.INT Benchmarking exercise.

This [link](#) leads you to the last version of the questionnaire, and to the suggested format for a short report. It is recommended that this preparation phase is not done by a single individual but is the occasion to gather a group of people that, inside the organisation or very near to it as stakeholders, may know and assess the international activities of the education or training institution. Although the preparation phase is not compulsory, it is suggested that every new participant in the Benchmarking goes through it to fully benefit from the following phases.

6. The Reply to the Benchmarking Questionnaire at Organisational Level

Before the “official” reply to the questionnaire in a collective setting (focus group or dedicated session), it is recommended that the people invited to the meeting are given access to the PDF version of the questionnaire and are invited to annotate what would be their personal reply. Once the preliminary individual replies and the meeting is taking place, the discussion should focus on the replies on which diverging replies are available. The discussion and the

explanation of different opinions should allow not only to agree what is the more accurate reply to the questionnaire at the organisational level, but also to clarify participants' views on the perceived success areas and possible improvement areas. When the collective reflection at organisational level is completed and an acceptable consensus level is reached, the group is ready to "officially" answer the benchmarking questions and to receive the immediate feedback that the system is providing.

This is the link to the online Benchmarking Questionnaire:
<https://digintrainers.eu/index.php/benchmark/>

7. Reflecting on the Feedback

After the reply, the participant organisation will get a representation of its relative position according to each section and each indicator of the benchmarking system. It will take the form of several spider diagrams, the first of which is simply representing the given replies, while the others are comparing the organisation results:

- With the whole group of the answering organisations
- With the organisations of the same country
- With the organisations of the same dimensional class
- With the organisations of the same "sector" (Higher Education or Vocational education and Training)

Every organisation will then be able to reflect on its absolute and relative position on all the indicators, and to decide on its priorities for progress.

It will be able to identify, through the assistance of the system management team, the best performer of each indicator to propose peer learning or future projects, while being guaranteed anonymity on its own replies if not specifically authorised for the purpose of future collaborations.

It will have access to the DIG.INT Competence Framework, that will allow a diagnostic on potential competence gaps related to the chosen improvement areas and will possibly have access to relevant learning paths in the specific field of internationalisation.

In broader terms, it will be encouraged to search for collaboration within its national: regional policy system and to engage in new European initiatives and projects coherent with the desired improvement areas.

8. Action Planning at Short-, Medium- and Long-Term

Reflecting on the results and exploring the resources of the project should lead to a plan of action to improve the organisation's performance in the different areas of internationalisation

included in the Benchmarking system, such as re-defining the internationalisation strategy, developing a capacity building and partnership plan, extending the internationalisation of education and training programmes, establishing a new monitoring system of organisational achievement, etc. Not all the actions will be feasible immediately, and an action plan with short-, medium- and long-term objectives and activities might be defined as an outcome of the Benchmarking exercise and the subsequent reflection.

9. Review After 2 Years

As many other systems, also the DIG.INT Benchmarking is not there to allow only one “picture” of a status at a given time but is conceived to measure progress on the chosen indicators and control that some progress has been made, at least in the areas that were chosen as priorities in the Action Planning phase. The suggested periodicity is two years, and each participant organisation will be able to observe its absolute and relative progress using the set of original indicators. However, the Benchmarking System is conceived as an evolutionary instrument, so, based on the assessment of users and of change factors affecting the VET/Technical HE sectors, the possible introduction of new indicators is also envisaged with a periodicity of two years.