VET SQUARED

VOCATIONAL EDUCATION AND TRAINING

Safeguarding Policy Report

Impact Assessment and Policy Report

Co-funded by the
Erasmus+ Programme
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Introduction

This Impact Assessment and Policy Recommendations report evaluates the VET2 Safeguarding Charter, Benchmarking Tool, and MOOC Platform as well as provides policy recommendations based on insights across the project's lifespan.

These outputs were developed as part of the Vet2 project, with the aim of promoting safeguarding practices and enhancing the quality of VET mobility programs for students. The Safeguarding Charter outlines minimum requirements for VET institutions to prioritise safeguarding, the Benchmarking Tool assesses an organisation's compliance with best practices, and the MOOC Platform offers educational resources to advance safeguarding expertise among VET practitioners.

Through national piloting and feedback, these outputs have been refined and improved. This evaluation also highlights the impact and transferability of the outputs, as well as provides policy recommendations for each partner country.

IO1 Safeguarding Charter Evaluation

The VET2 Safeguarding Charter lays out the minimum requirements that VET institutions need to meet in order to consider themselves safeguarding focused. This will help VET providers to develop an institutional culture which better understands the importance of safeguarding being at the forefront of all organisational activities, as well as the range of differing approaches found in contemporary society. In order to ensure that the charter is as user friendly as possible, the minimum requirements are categorised in line with different activities of a VET institution (e.g. HR policy, facilities, course design, staff support and training, student engagement etc.).

To enable the streamlining and embedding for implementation process, the charter firstly recommends that organisation must ensure that child safeguarding must be prioritised at any cost and any concerns that emerges in the context of child safety must be informed well in time to the concerned authorities. The charter also suggests that principle of "Do no harm" referring to organisational responsibility to minimise the harm must not be used only in humanitarian sector but must be equally implemented in the field of safeguarding.

The charter further recognised the dire need of clear set of definitions in the legal framework under which all the organisations in most of the participating countries operate. From the governance point of view, it is imperative to acknowledge risks and address them in order to avert the risks timely. Another important recommendation is to include multi directional assessment about the mobility in context of the student/organisation engagement. It is recommended that organisations must incorporate more evaluation processes at each stage of mobility in order to have safe mobility experiences. Moreover, staff must be adequately trained and available at all times during mobility to address the concerns or risks.

Furthermore, the charter has laid down certain requirements that organisations, parents, students should follow in order to participate on Erasmus+ mobilities in 3 stages: before departure, during stay & after returning home.

Overall, the impact of the Charter will be to encourage governance approaches to safeguarding which are benchmarked against robust quality requirements. More precisely, the Safeguarding

Quality Charter presents the minimum requirements that VET institutions need to meet in order to consider themselves safeguarding focused. Ensuring a safe preparation before departure, a secure implementation during the stay, and follow-up of mobility activities after returning home, are important elements for a successful project highlighted in this Charter.

The requirements outlined in the charter has been designed with transferability in mind. The requirements will act as minimum recommendations which VET institutions can shape and develop around their own unique situations. As a result, the charter will be highly transferable, both across providers in partner countries and into other European contexts.

To aid this transferability, the final charter is also translated into all partner languages. Due to the lack of a clear legal framework in most participating countries, particularly with regard to the definition of minors and the frames surrounding mobility and minors, research conducted during the compilation of charter has shown that there is a significant need for policy action.

With the ultimate goal of maintaining safe and secure mobility programmes for young students travelling abroad to pursue a period of study or vocation, the Vet Squared project has clearly focused on developing a set of practical standards and guidelines for implementation in the form of this charter, as well as an e-course, community of best practise, and resource bank for VET practitioners.

The charter set the stage for the higher-level, systemic adoption of a uniform European VET Mobility Safeguarding Policy. The overall goal of the charter is to create a comprehensive, European policy for the effective protection and promotion of high-quality mobility of VET students. This charter will highlight the significance and continual necessity of safeguarding awareness and review within mobility activities. Additionally, it will make it possible to adopt safeguarding best practices throughout Pan-European VET mobility organisations.

IO2 Benchmarking Tool Evaluation

The piloting phase of the IO2 Safeguarding Benchmarking Tool was done in Italy, Spain, Hungary, Greece and UK using different online tools such as Zoom, Google Meet and Microsoft Teams Platform. The events primarily took place in two parts; wherein the participants in the first half learned about the website, the project's background, the partners, the project's objectives, and its goals.

In the second half, the VET Mobility Safeguarding Benchmarking Tool was introduced, with each step outlined in detail as participants tested the tool and provided feedback. Finally, the evaluation questionnaire was provided to all the participants for their feedback and valuable opinions. Overall, the feedback was positive and the participants provided constructive comments and new ideas how to improve our work.

Major stakeholders for the event were:

- VET providers
- people working in international VET mobilities
- professionals involved in leading VET mobility groups
- teachers working in high schools or VET education centres

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Overall, the feedback was positive and participants were enthusiastic about the safeguarding benchmarking tool. Some participants also commented that they noticed safeguarding steps or procedures that they were not carrying out.

A few participants also mentioned that language of the tool was too specific and not understandable if anyone is not involved in Erasmus+ mobilities yet. A few were also concerned about the tool's overall utility due to lack of time and guidance. An overall final report was prepared and the collective feedback was integrated, showing that the project was moving in the right direction.

IO3 Safeguarding Platform Evaluation

The IO3 Safeguarding Platform and E-course underwent national piloting in each of the five consortium nations. All the nations except Italy used an online survey questionnaire for their piloting, which was distributed to key VET stakeholders after being translated into local languages. In Italy, a focus group was held with 30 people, made up of teachers, office personnel, and international coordinators followed by an online survey.

A minimum of 30 responses were collected for each questionnaire from each nation. A total of 154 responses were received, including 32 from Greece, 30 from Hungary, 30 from Italy, 32 from Spain, and 30 from the UK. In order to evaluate the quality and impact of our output, the VET mobility e-learning platform's piloting procedure was carried out in a number of nations. Overall, these piloting initiatives offered insightful feedback that helped shape and improve the VET mobility e-learning platform.
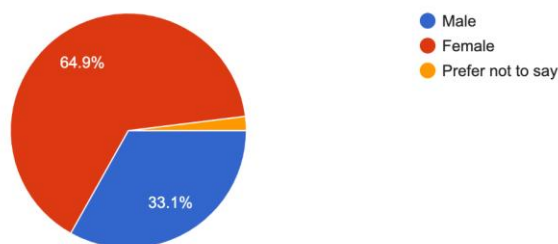

What country are you affiliated with?
154 responses

- United Kingdom
- Greece
- Spain
- Italy
- Hungary
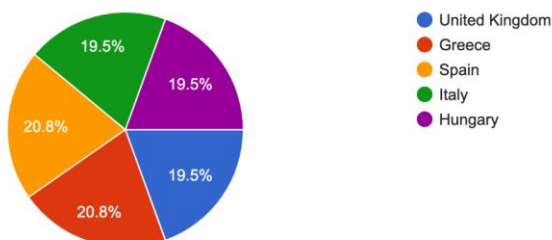
Across all participants, 65% were female, 33% were male, and 2% preferred not to identify.

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What is your gender?
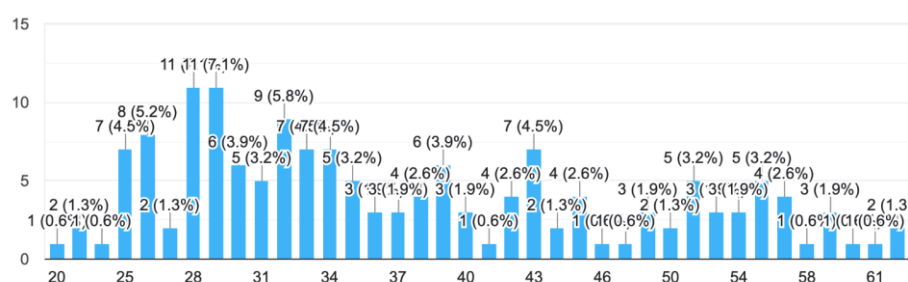154 responses

- Male
- Female
- Prefer not to say

64.9%

33.1%

Additionally, we had a broad range of ages from 20 to 62, with the most participants between in their late-twenties to mid-thirties.

What is your age?
154 responses

These demographic analyses help put the comments obtained in each country into context and offer valuable insights into the sample's diversity.

We foresaw a number of potential issues throughout the piloting, such as a lack of interest from stakeholders and a lack of resources. We sought to conduct open and adaptable piloting sessions in order to overcome these problems. Despite these efforts, all nations, with the exception of Italy, reported some difficulties during piloting. Finding volunteers for the online pilot session was the biggest problem in Greece because safeguarding procedures weren't being used or implemented. The pilot study's breadth was limited by the lack of participants, yet insightful information and feedback were nonetheless acquired. Hungary had trouble getting people to participate in the piloting activities, perhaps as a result of a recent crisis in the educational system where teachers were involved in protests and strikes. In the UK, it was challenging to find piloting participants due to the small number of VET schools for minors and the low rates of sector mobility. The availability of VET mobilities was also impacted by the UK's exit from the EU and the switch to the Turing programme.

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Despite these challenges, we were able to conduct fruitful piloting sessions and met the minimum number or participants per country. Overall, participants had positive feedback for the platform, with 52% saying the content was fully understandable, 41% saying the majority was understandable, and 7% responding neutrally.

How clear and easy to follow is the content of the platform?
154 responses

- Fully understandable
- The majority are understandable
- Neutral
- The majority are not understandable
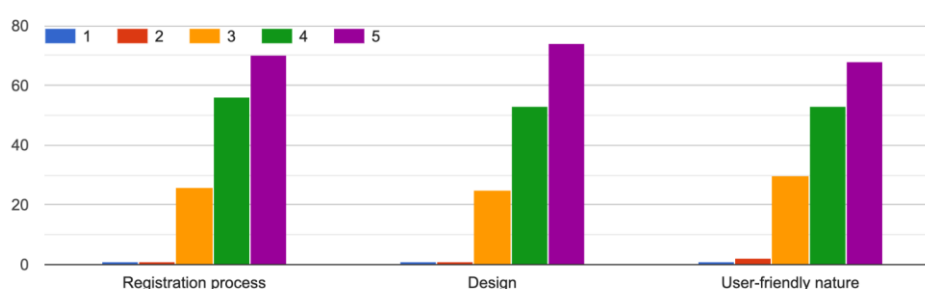- Not understandable at all
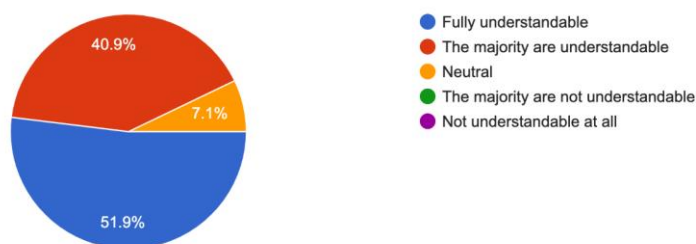
Additionally, most participants rated each of the modules, the resource bank, the self-assessment, the network of best practices, registration process, design, and user friendliness as 4 or 5 out of 5.

How do you like the modules and the other features of the platform?
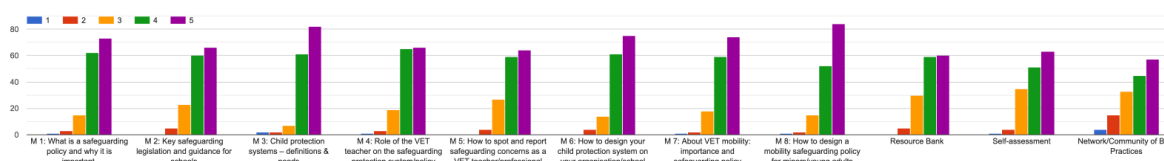
Please, rate the following aspects of the MOOC
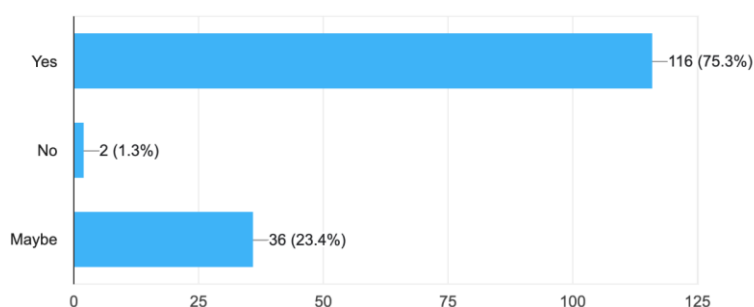

In line with these positive ratings, many participants also noted they would recommend the platform to their colleagues (75%) or would plan to use it in their institution in the future (60%), demonstrating broad potential impact at both the individual and institutional scale.
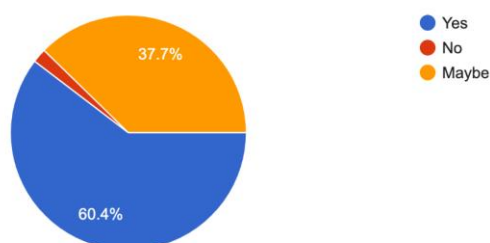
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Would you recommend the platform to your colleagues?
154 responses

Response	Count
Yes	116 (75.3%)
No	2 (1.3%)
Maybe	36 (23.4%)

Do you plan to use this platform in your institute in the future?
154 responses

- Yes: 60.4%
- No
- Maybe: 37.7%

As part of the piloting, we also asked users in each country to offer suggestions for improving the platform. Some users in Hungary noted that certain themes and modules were unrelated, while others thought some content was necessary yet repetitive. Users mentioned that the platform's networking capabilities were weak and that there should be more options for community interaction. Participants in Italy found the modules and platform features to be helpful, but one user proposed changing the design and brought out the platform's lack of use in the absence of sufficient instruction. Participants in Spain gave the platform satisfactory ratings for usability, design, and accessibility, although they said they would want to see less advertising and improved support for mobile devices. Participants in the UK enjoyed the platform's well-organised content and layout, but some thought certain material should have been included sooner in the courses.

This valuable user feedback improved the platform, leading to a streamlined registration procedure, fewer requests for personal information, and more emphasis on functions like the network of best practices. According to feedback, learning experiences were also improved by using simplified language.

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The majority of participants gave good feedback and expressed a strong propensity to use and promote the platform to others. Overall, the platform received positive reviews, was regarded as user-friendly and high quality, and was considered to be helpful for the mobility industry.

Impact Assessment

The VET2 Safeguarding Charter was created to outline the basic standards that VET institutions must satisfy in order to claim to be safeguarding-focused. Although the concept of a charter for service design is present at the national level in various European nations, the issue is that local and regional implementation of these charters is rarely consistent.

Therefore, there are two ways to summarise the novelty of this output. First, this output provides a fresh strategy to help student mobility providers incorporate the safeguarding charter into their offerings and operations in partner nations without charters. The project's diversified approach to safeguarding concerns produced a set of requirements that will support VET institutions in developing a top-down perspective toward safeguarding. As a result, they will be better able to handle the numerous complex problems that fall within the broad category of safeguarding obligations.

The findings and recommendations of the output were influenced by regional and local implementation strategies, national reports, policy documents, and policy documents from throughout Europe. Research on developments at the European level as well as methods and best practices in European nations outside of the partnership were used to ensure the final charter has a decidedly pan-European perspective.

The charter's requirements were also crafted with transferability at their core. The feasibility of linking this charter is apparent as institutions can customise and develop these requirements to fit their particular circumstances. These requirements serve as minimum guidelines. The charter therefore is transferable, both between providers in partner nations and into other European contexts. The final charter is also translated into each partner language to aid in this transferability.

The VET2 benchmarking tool presents an organisation's overall compliance with safeguarding best practices in order to help organisations understand their progression towards a high level of safeguarding practice within their organisation. An organisation will be able to download a certificate to display their "excellent" safeguarding score. while safeguarding concerns are a common concern across Europe, VET institutions find it difficult to stay current with and incorporate new advances into VET mobility operations. The majority of VET employees are not experts in this field, so they require direction and help to know how to handle issues. As a result, this tool is innovative by offering extensive benchmarking support that will not only demonstrate to VET providers what a safeguarding-focused company looks like but also directing them on their path to achieving this level themselves.

The VET2 MOOC is an educational accelerator for VET practitioners and mobility group leaders to advance their practical safeguarding expertise. Transferability was a fundamental consideration in the platform's technical definition. The platform and the content created on it is extremely portable, both between providers in partner nations and into other European contexts. The

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resources created as a part of VET Mobility Safeguarding Resource Bank will support the direct target groups' self-awareness and self-assessment relating to safeguarding professional development. The resources hosted and developed for the resource bank are categorised based on the safeguarding competences developed on the charter developed in IO1 and have been developed to ensure transferability across different European contexts and updated with relevant European and national level policy and compliance updates and regulations.

While making the VET2 MOOC platform, we ran into a number of technical challenges that needed to be overcome. First and foremost was the selection of a platform layout that would be suitable for hosting modules, videos, and quizzes. After this structure was chosen, there were challenges uploading the modules to the final platform so we chose to opt for a versatile and transferrable e-reader format. Additionally, as part of our resource bank, we developed summary videos for each module. Translating and synchronising these translations for each video was a challenge and took much more time than expected as new videos had to be created for each language. Overall, these challenges required innovation and improvisation from the project team but were overcome in the end.

Policy Recommendations

For educational institutions, host organisations, and policymakers alike, the safety and well-being of learners taking part in vocational education and training (VET) mobilities is a crucial responsibility. A multidimensional strategy that includes comprehensive policies, efficient training, and sufficient resources is needed to ensure that students are protected from abuse, exploitation, and injury.

Throughout this project, we have partnered with extensive numbers of VET professionals across different national context during the research and piloting stages of our previous outputs. Through this process, we have gained invaluable insights onto strengths and weaknesses in existing safeguarding legislation. With that in mind, the VET2 project team has prepared the following policy recommendations for each of our five partner countries.

Greece

The safety and well-being of learners participating in vocational education and training (VET) mobilities is a critical priority for educational institutions, host organisations, and policymakers alike. Ensuring that students are protected from abuse, exploitation, and harm requires a multifaceted approach that involves comprehensive policies, effective training, and adequate resources. Below, we provide recommendations for the European Union and member states to strengthen their safeguarding policies and procedures for VET mobilities, with a focus on keeping learners safe, included, and supported throughout their educational journey:

- Develop standardised procedures for risk assessment and management, which should be tailored to the specific needs and characteristics of each mobility program. This should include procedures for assessing the risks associated with different destinations and activities, as well as procedures for responding to emergencies and crises.

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- Encourage the establishment of peer-to-peer support networks for students participating in mobilities, which can provide a valuable source of support and advice for those experiencing challenges or issues while abroad.
- Provide ongoing support and monitoring to ensure that safeguarding policies and procedures are being effectively implemented and that all parties involved in educational mobilities are aware of their responsibilities. This could include regular check-ins with students and host families, as well as regular training and support for staff and stakeholders.
- Establish partnerships and collaborations between educational institutions, host organisations, and relevant local authorities to facilitate effective communication and coordination in the event of an incident or emergency.
- Conduct regular evaluations and reviews of safeguarding policies and procedures to ensure that they remain effective and relevant, and that they continue to address the evolving needs and challenges associated with educational mobilities.

Hungary

VET Mobility must take into account existing inequalities, which are more visible and even reinforced in many education and training systems. According to researchers, members of the vulnerable social groups generally do not have the same educational and training options (Smither, 2014a). Low motivation, along with low self-confidence and self-esteem, are prevalent concerns among people from impoverished backgrounds who do not consider themselves as "natural" participants in mobility programs. As a result, these types of programs have a unique value for disadvantaged people, as they provide them with a unique opportunity to develop self-confidence, self-esteem, a sense of purpose, and to clarify personal objectives and desires under well-designed structures and processes.

- We recommend strengthening the inclusion of students with fewer opportunities with reinforced mentoring and extra support. Child protection systems and safeguarding policies should be integrated in all phases of the mobility programs. VET Squared Safeguarding Quality Charter is a good source and draws attention to the minimum requirements, and the Benchmarking Tool provides a self-assessment tool and show the trajectory in improving safeguarding standards in the organisations.
- We recommend issuing practical recommendations and setting up quality standard requirements considering each phase of the mobilities. In VET Mobility there are many different actors involved (coordinating/sending/receiving organisations, receiving company, hosting family, accompanying person, etc.), getting in touch with the students, minors - even people outside of the education sector. They should all have a basic understanding on child protection systems, safeguarding policies and how to provide the possible best experience for the students.
- We recommend having an obligatory course for all the different actors with an introduction to VET Mobility and tailored modules highlighting their exact roles and responsibilities. Preparation (linguistic, cultural, task-based, professional, etc) is essential for a successful mobility experience. For many young people, the VET mobility is their first-

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time abroad especially for student with fewer opportunities. It is essential to have a supportive environment and support of the family.

- We recommend including families and parents of the students in the preparation, holding extra information sessions and cooperating with them during all the mobility to ensure the best possible support for the students. After returning home, special attention should be paid to reintegration activities and supporting the students' reflection on their new knowledge and skills. This ensures a wide impact on the participants' professional and personal development and encourages them for future participation in different EU programmes targeting young people.
- We recommend strengthening the post-mobility activities from the quality point of view, providing extra mentoring and support for the students, and provide tools and support to reflect on their new skills and knowledge.

Italy

A safeguarding policy provides a set of directives and guidelines to be implemented at organisational and personnel management levels to promote the highest standards of personal and professional behaviour and practice in order to create safe environments and prevent harmful situations for girls, boys and adolescents during their involvement in activities, projects or programmes.

The development of a safeguarding policy is an opportunity for every organisation to align its strategy and planning with its organisational mission. This is a tool that protects both children and staff by clearly defining what actions are needed to keep children safe and ensure consistency of behaviour and more transparent processes for all.

When adopting an internal protection policy, the organisation in question will strive to minimise risks and address concerns and incidents appropriately and seriously when they arise. Internationally, a number of organisations require the adoption of their own child and youth protection policy in order to access calls and funding initiatives. The adoption of an adequate and specific child and adolescent protection policy is in fact an indication of any organisation's commitment to the youngest generation, as well as a tool through which institutions and agencies can consolidate and strengthen the degree of trust of the citizenry.

When considering a safeguarding policy, we recommend asking the following questions:

- Which are potential behavioural indicators within Child Safeguarding?
- How is it possible to raise the awareness of those involved on the issue of violence and abuse, on the risks related to their work?
- Which groups of educational/social care professionals need to be aware of safeguarding children/young people?
- How to differentiate between fact and opinion, and use these appropriately within written safeguarding records?

Spain

It is advisable that a mandatory step, prior to the children's mobility, is to organise and set clear agreements that aim at safeguarding their learning stay. We recommend:

- To establish a unified risk management plan across the EU in order to be prepared in advance to any issues that may arise and adapt it to the specific needs each mobility may entail.
- To raise awareness and highlight the importance of having these policies for everyone involved in the process of Erasmus+ mobilities.
- To use the tools created thanks to the VET^2 Project as a reliable source of materials and information to help foster protection and safeguarding of children.

UK

Educational institutions of all kinds have a duty of care to protect the safety and wellbeing of students, especially if they are minors or have special needs. While this should be a priority during day-to-day instruction, it's especially important during mobilities which can present unique risks and concerns for student safety. The European Union can support this goal by creating common guidance and policies that apply to educational institutions in all member states. In reflection of the research undertaken during the VET Squared project, we have prepared the following policy recommendations.

We recommend that the EU and member states:

- Develop and implement comprehensive safeguarding policies that clearly outline the responsibilities of all parties involved in educational mobilities. Ideally, these policies should include clear reporting mechanisms and channels for addressing concerns or incidents of abuse or harm.
- Prioritise awareness and training initiatives for all individuals involved in educational mobilities, including students, staff, and host families. Trainings should include sections on identifying and responding to signs of abuse or harm, as well as understanding the relevant policies and procedures.
- Ensure that educational institutions and host organisations have the necessary resources to implement effective safeguarding measures, including staffing, training, and funding for support services.
- Strengthen background checks and vetting procedures for staff and host families involved in educational mobilities, particularly those working with vulnerable populations.

Conclusion

In conclusion, the evaluation of the VET2 Safeguarding Charter, Benchmarking Tool, and MOOC Platform demonstrates the commitment of the Vet2 project to promoting safe and secure mobility programs for VET students. These outputs have been designed to meet the specific needs of VET institutions, addressing the importance of safeguarding and providing practical guidelines for

implementation. The positive feedback received during the piloting phase indicates the usefulness and effectiveness of these tools and resources.

The Safeguarding Charter sets a benchmark for safeguarding-focused governance in VET institutions, encouraging the adoption of consistent and robust quality standards across Europe. Its requirements are designed to be transferable, allowing institutions to tailor them to their unique contexts while still maintaining a pan-European perspective.

The Benchmarking Tool provides a comprehensive assessment of an organisation's safeguarding practices, enabling VET providers to measure their compliance and identify areas for improvement. The positive feedback received from participants highlights its potential impact on enhancing safeguarding practices within the mobility industry.

The MOOC Platform offers a valuable resource for VET practitioners and mobility group leaders to enhance their safeguarding expertise. Its user-friendly design, high-quality content, and positive user feedback indicate its potential to be widely adopted and recommended within the VET community.

Overall, the evaluation underscores the importance of safeguarding awareness and continuous review in VET mobility activities. The outputs of the Vet2 project provide a foundation for the development of a comprehensive European VET Mobility Safeguarding Policy. By implementing the recommendations outlined in this evaluation, educational institutions, host organisations, and policymakers can ensure the safety and well-being of learners participating in VET mobilities.

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