

BOO STRESS

Boosting the skills of youth to deal
with stress at work



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Infusion of the
BooStress Package in
the labor market

Adaption and Policy
Package [I05]



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Introduction

This document represents the fifth Intellectual Output to be produced for the Erasmus+ project, 'Boosting the skills of youth to deal with stress at work' [BooStress].

The purpose of this "Adaption and Policy Package" is to provide specific guidelines to the BooStress stakeholders regarding two specific implementation areas. On the one hand it shall deliver on how to integrate the BooStress training package into the normal training activities of an organisation, on the other hand it shall provide a policy framework regarding how to promote efficient digital VET and youth education. The contents of the specific parts will include:

Training implementation

This part will contain pedagogical and didactical guidelines giving you some hints about how to adapt the BooStress Training package in normal training activities in the best way. How can you utilize BooStress results efficiently as a VET component?

Thus, it will contain chapters on:

- Instructions on the BooStress online education tools and their use
- Methods of adaptations to stakeholders' activities
- Implementation case studies
- Accreditation potential based on EQF and ECVET

Policy Framework

This part is specifically addressed to stakeholders and decision makers in the field of VET and youth education, such as VET training providers and course developers. It aims to promote digital VET and Youth education amongst them. It shall show how to improve the efficiency, the attraction and impact of the youth and VET policies and initiatives, based on the experiences acquired through BooStress.

Thus, it will contain chapters on:

- Ongoing challenges of EU and all partner countries to up-skill and re-skill their young workers
- Advantages and impact of digital VET and youth education
- Advantages and impact of accreditation system
- Methods of adaption to stakeholders' activities
- How to improve the efficiency, the attraction and the impact for the youth and VET policies and initiatives, based on the experiences gained from BooStress

But to be able to implement results and to promote them we have to know what are the specific tools proposed by BooStress.

About BooStress Project

“BooStress – Boosting the skills of youth to deal with stress at work” is a project co-funded by the Erasmus+ programme of the European Union, which proposes the development of a vocational training package to equip current and prospective young workers with stress management skills, in the context of a health and safety framework, and build their capacity to address relevant challenges in their work environment. The BooStress project aims to: (a) upgrade and multiply the opportunities for up-skilling and re-skilling young workers in managing work related stress, via innovative VET tools and pedagogies, accompanied by skills acquisition, assessment, recognition and validation methods; (b) empower the youth to co-opt with the contemporary market needs in the EU, where it will also promote collaboration, communication and networking among employed and non-employed EU citizens.

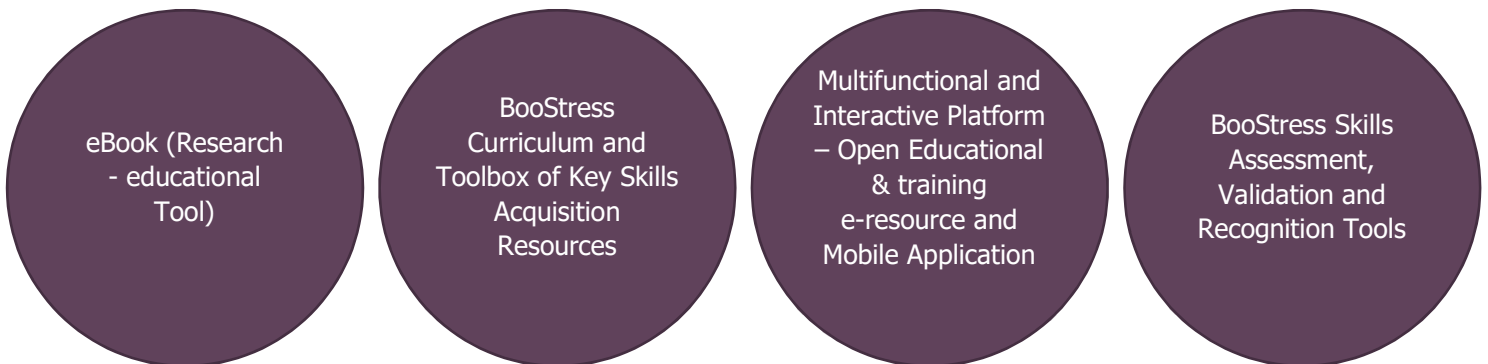
More specifically, the project makes a substantial contribution to:

- Combat low levels of stress management skills among young workers through open and inclusive digital tools, resources and practices
- Empower young workers to become creators of their own career via soft skills acquisition and to maximize their employability opportunities
- Provide innovative youth and VET pedagogical methods, best practice guidelines, and strategies towards the use of digital tools and innovative learning environments
- Empower all stakeholders to use innovative ICT-based VET practices and resources in enhancing new skills for youth
- Provide contemporary methods and tools for assessment of skills acquisition, recognition and validation

The overall aim is to produce new theory, resources and practices that impact on youth and VET practice. Pedagogical materials and open educational resources, available at www.boostress.eu are packaged for sharing with documentation to assist in their re-use. BooStress’ flexible digital development will allow easy adaptability in multiple contexts “enhancing in this way the digital integration in learning, teaching and training at all levels” and supporting its sustainability and compatibility with upcoming market challenges. More information about the project outputs is included in the following section.

BooStress Online Education Tools

The education tools of the BooStress project consist of the following different resources:



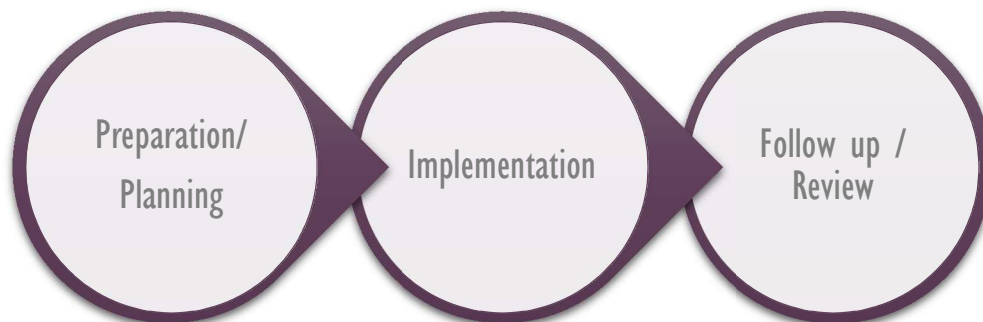
- The first important step was the development of the BooStress eBook, which is a Research Educational Tool, based on desk-based and field research in Cyprus, Spain and Ireland, and across other EU Member States .
- Then, partners developed the BooStress Curriculum and Toolbox of Key Skills Acquisition Resources for stress management.
- Building upon these, partners developed the multifunctional and interactive platform with open educational resources as well as our mobile app (available for Android smartphones and iPhones) to train young people in stress management.
- Finally, in the project, we developed a Handbook for trainers containing Skills Assessment, Validation and Recognition Tools, developed to validate and recognize the skills acquired through the training. These tools help educators, trainers, HR professionals, managers and employers to assess and validate the learning of young employees, who have completed the BooStress training package in their organisations and businesses.

Guidelines for Training Implementation

For BooStress training we propose the same 3step process as should be done for all educational intervention and we will give recommendation for each of these phases:

Instructions on the BooStress online education tools and their use

For BooStress training we propose the same 3step process as should be done for all educational intervention and we will give recommendation for each of these phases:



Preparation:

First of all, please check if BooStress really fits into the objectives of the organisation or training you shall provide. The training objectives of BooStress are to empower young employees to deal better with work related stress by supporting them in identifying the sources of their stress so as to be able to find appropriate solutions. In the case of BooStress, participants who do not have or have low job experience, could find the material difficult to understand and/or relate to a working place. Then it might be necessary to provide them with additional information or practical examples. In any case, BooStress is expected to have a positive impact on them, as it prepares them for later job experiences and gives them an idea of how to check sources for job related stress.

It is always of advantage to provide examples of good practice application; this eases the users to better understand the aim of the training. In that way BooStress is not an easy-going 5 minutes tool, but a framework to identify if the stress is caused by individual, interpersonal or structural reasons

Therefore, assure that the timeframe is sufficient to cover the training duration and training facilities are convenient, so that people can concentrate on the contents and find enough time for reflection. The eLearning platform provides the opportunity for workers to attend the BooStress modules at their own pace and at their own space. However, in case you decide to adapt and implement the resources in a face-to-face training, assure that you yourself are familiar enough with the training contents so that you can support the trainees during the learning process and deal with their questions and doubts. This includes also national law with regards to workers' rights and safety regulations, local and regional support services on training but also protection needs.

Implementation:

Here again, especially if you did not do it in the preparation phase, check:

- Timeframe for the implementation of BooStress exercises (each module provides an estimation of time required to complete it, so that you can easily plan the time needed). If you have limited time, it is recommended to gradually implement a selection of the material based on your needs.

- Training facilities which should provide a pleasant environment where: (a) participants have access to the internet through a laptop, iPhone or smartphone and can concentrate on the contents. You should also consider some space for the implementation of exercises, such as the breathing techniques of module 2, and time for reflection. If the training room has no internet access, you should instruct the participants to download in advance the BooStress app from the Google Play or App Store; the eLearning platform is available offline through the app.
- Certainly, you must also take into consideration key elements relevant for all kinds of training during implementation, such as, motivating learners to participate in the training activities. If they are conducting the e-learning sessions on their own, the trainer will have to support the learners, monitor their attendance and participation. As soon as you notice low attendance or participation, you should mention it to the learners (“energizers” might help). A brief discussion is often sufficient to reinforce the importance of their engagement in the training. Even if an online learning platform provides the learners with information, content and tools that support their learning of new skills and knowledge, nevertheless the impact of their learning depends on the trainer, mentor or employer. If the implementation of the e-learning platform has no instructors assigned to it, such as a stand-alone e-learning programme, then other means should be provided to assist the learners when they need it, such as a support line, a discussion group, etc.

Follow up /Review

How are you going to evaluate the quality of the activities and the achievement of objectives? Choose the most convenient form for the group and the setting, but ensure that you get feedback not only on the quality of the e-learning but also on the benefit of it for the specific users (the young employees), the practitioners (counsellors, trainers,...) and the organisations where you implemented the training. This will be very beneficial for you for the future promotion and implementation of the BooStress training package, especially in regard to the next points. Adaptation in terms of improving the efficiency of the training in future implementation could relate to:

- A better adaptation to local needs: trainers and employers can choose beforehand certain modules or units, based on what better suits their employees and whether they will conduct the training at a group session, allowing some time for reflection (semi-facilitated) or if they will allow their employees a reasonable amount of time to complete the training at their own pace.
- A better adaptation to organisation’s working field: trainers and employers can choose beforehand certain modules or units, based on what better suits the type of business or organisation as well as the overall working environment.
- A better adaptation to IT and literacy skills of employees: an induction to the BooStress eLearning platform might be needed in case of low IT skills.
- Adaptation to national context and legal standards: trainers and employers should check with relevant authorities if there is the possibility to provide the BooStress online training as an accredited programme and, if this is the case, what is the process to follow.
- Adaptation to changes to actual context and legal standards: since this is an online course, trainers and employers are strongly encouraged to check beforehand if the content can still be of use in line with the most recent scientific data and trends, especially after the project completion (i.e. 31.10.2019).

Directions for Accreditation and Certification

The European Qualifications Framework (EQF) "is a common European reference framework which links countries' qualifications systems together, acting as a translation device to make qualifications more readable and understandable across different countries and systems in Europe" (European Commission, 2008). It is a translation tool that helps communication and comparison between qualifications systems in Europe. In developing the BooStress training package, project partners were mindful of ensuring that the produced learning content is benchmarked to the EQF. As such, following the research and needs assessment phase of the project, partners assessed that based on the identified training needs and prior educational levels of the young employees we are targeting with these materials, that benchmarking the BooStress training package to EQF level 5 would be most appropriate to our target audience. With this descriptor in mind, BooStress project partners have developed a set of assessment questions that should be completed by learners at the end of each online module.

These assessment questions are benchmarked to the standards described at EQF level 5, and can be accessed through the BooStress e-learning platform: www.boostress.eu/en/e-learning

The European Credit system for Vocational Education and Training (ECVET) helps individuals who are trying to acquire a vocational education and training (VET) qualification to move between countries and gain access to lifelong learning. It does so by making it easier to transfer, to have recognised and to accumulate assessed learning outcomes (CEDEFOP, 2015). For ECVET validation all learning outcomes are described in units, so that they can be validated in credits. In developing the BooStress training package, project partners developed the module content following a learning outcomes approach. As such, the BooStress training package has been developed to be aligned with the ECVET structures and quality standards. A set of self-assessment and validation exercises for young employees in your business or organisation to complete on their own first, and then to be validated by an employer or trainer are offered as part of the BooStress Training Package.

When planning, developing and testing the learning materials contained in the BooStress training package, partners were careful to follow the model proposed by EQAVET to assure the quality of the learning content produced. As such, the BooStress training package meets the needs and preferences of young employees and will be positively evaluated by this target group as being effective in supporting them to manage their stress in the workplace. The BooStress training package has completed a series of pilot tests, evaluations and revisions based on the feedback from the primary target groups of the project – young employees and their employers.

Please check the "BooStress" Skills Assessment, Recognition and Validation Tools available on the project website www.boostress.eu (check on "Outputs"). In the Handbook, you will find on the one hand specific description of the aforementioned tools – amongst others – and, on the other hand, some practical guidelines, questionnaires and templates for assessment.

Policy Recommendations & Exploitation

This part of the paper aims to provide recommendations to policy and decision-makers in the fields of employment and training on how to make best use of the results of BooStress project. Thus, it is addressed to training providers, employment-related counselling professionals, human resources staff, employers, etc. It also outlines how the project can be exploited and actually be of value to organisations and individuals outside of the project consortium.

Certified training programme in similar training field

As BooStress resources are available free of charge, license-free and online, everybody can implement them as online e-training resources in their own institutions. As an already certified training programme, it can be implemented as it is, the whole package, or unit by unit in different training steps. In Ireland, Cyprus and Spain, there is no such certified training (there are some uncertified courses and only in specific fields). Therefore, the partners aim to promote the materials to relevant national stakeholders to introduce the materials sustainably, such as

- Universities (e.g. Cyprus and Spain)
- Via the Youth Council (Cyprus and Ireland) and Youth departments of local public administration (Spain and Ireland) to several Youth organizations
- Civil society organizations and social work associations
- Public administration providing work related trainings (Spain)
- National and regional institutions responsible for VET training (Ireland)
- Regional agencies responsible for health and safety at work (Ireland)
- Chambers of Commerce (Cyprus and Spain)
- Program "Mikri Arktos" of the Youth Board of Cyprus

Part of existing or new VET trainings

BooStress can even be implemented in similar trainings as additional resources, as added value to existing materials or to create a totally new training adapted to the organisation's needs. In that case, the BooStress training materials can be a valuable support as they already provide piloted and evaluated training units with time indicators as well as self-assessment, evaluation and validation materials. In this sense, we recommend BooStress to be integrated in apprenticeships, internships, or pre-employment programmes dedicated to young people.

Part of an organisation's contract

As an employer or human resource professional, you can introduce BooStress as a standard as part of the organisation's on-boarding and employee support programme. This might help you to introduce measures to support improved working conditions and stress management. This can help to improve the working climate and efficiency in your organisation. If you do so, ensure to implement the materials in a way they are used continuously and people are doing a periodic review (e.g. every year /two years/...). Thus, the BooStress Online Training Programme can serve as a CPD, i.e. Continuous Professional Development, for the staff members' ongoing training, or as an induction programme to newly recruited staff.

During the project implementation in the three countries, the BooStress materials proved to be interesting for enterprises of different sizes, especially in regional business networks and for SMEs, who do not have the resources to invest in stress management training for their employees. As such, the BooStress training package proved to be very beneficial to businesses of different sizes and different regions.

Training for other counselling and educational organizations

BooStress is suitable and can be supplied to other counseling and educational organisations, including Human Resources Development agencies, as a training to improve their knowledge on health and safety at work, stress management and working quality evaluation. In this vein, BooStress partners contacted both VET and adult education providers to promote the material, but also made direct contact with educators and young people who are concerned about work-related stress. In addition, partners already integrated the BooStress materials in their ongoing educational and training activities to young people and educators.

Dedicated service to the funding state agencies

BooStress can even be offered as a dedicated service to state agencies (labour market service, ministries, etc.) to evaluate stress exposure among the workforce in their country. In this sense BooStress will be of interest to:

- Health and Safety Authorities
- Health Service Executives
- Mental Health Services – Ministry of Health
- Critical Incident Stress Management Networks
- National and Regional Networks of HR professionals
- Departments of Labour Inspection
- Chambers of Commerce and Industry

Policy exploitation potential

The BooStress project can be of use to organisations and individuals from different parts of Europe at a local, national and European perspective.

The local level skills base is enhanced resulting from the increase of innovation within the local youth and VET (through new methods for teaching and learning) and the participation in the research and development of the online course; this, in turn, responds to local level policy in the 3 partner nations (Ireland, Spain, Cyprus) to up-skill the training and education sector. In parallel, the relationships between formal and non-formal learning, with a better understanding of regional and national level needs and the potential symbiotic benefits of formal education and vocational training partnerships, is to be enhanced gradually in the partner countries.

At a European level, the training programme of the BooStress project contributes to achieving harmonization of standards in technology enhanced learning in youth and VET developed across European borders, through the creation of open source educational resources and pedagogical materials available internationally. The project promotes the Erasmus+ priorities (i.e. 2013 communication on Opening Up education; extending and developing VET educators' competences; and sustainable investment, performance and efficiency of education and training) and also promotes the Europe 2020 Smart Growth targets, the Youth Agenda, and the 2011 EU Modernisation Agenda.

Conclusions

The BooStress “Adaption and Policy Package” provides guidelines to stakeholders on how to integrate the BooStress training package in their normal training activities, how to utilise it as an VET component and how the modules and trainees can be accredited based on European tools (such as EQF, ECVET). The accreditation and certification guidelines provided in the BooStress toolkit are expected to be a motivation for the stakeholders to adapt and adopt it in their normal training activities. Moreover, it provides a policy framework to promote further efficient digital VET and youth education. The policy drafting and making framework comes to address the ongoing challenges of EU Member States, and in particular all partner countries, to up-skill and re-skill their young workers.

The BooStress outputs developed by the consortium through a 2-year process provide high quality educational materials and practical tools for all organisations active in the field of employment and training, as well as young people, allowing them to deal with work-related stress. Representatives of the stakeholders participated in all project phases such as the preparation, design, development, implementation, evaluation and multiplication. All products have been piloted and evaluated with experts and young professionals in all three partner countries (Cyprus, Spain, and Ireland) in order to assure their quality, relevance and impact on the target audience.

By October 2019, when the project formally ends, we expect to have generated valuable support for the project outputs from youth organisations and networks, VET institutions, accreditation bodies, human resource companies, SMEs, research and development centers, public institutions, local community groups and authorities, civil society organisations, professional networks, etc. and to offer them the materials of BooStress for free use (all materials will remain available for free for at least 3 years on the project website at www.boostress.eu). Through the adaptation measures and policy recommendations, included in this package, it is expected that organisations will be able to increase the knowledge of trainees and trainers working in the field of youth support and training, VET, and health and safety management. In the long-run, we expect our results to contribute to an inclusive European labour market, oriented towards the latest technological and socio-economic progress to the benefit of all European youth.