

TOUR-X

Skills WatchTower — Long-Term Action Plan

Purpose of this page. This text sets out how the Skills WatchTower will continue to be used, maintained and shared after the end of the TOUR-X project. It reproduces the Long-Term Action Plan submitted to the Project Officer, reformatted for online publication.

1. Description of the Action and its Physical Object

The D5.2 Skills WatchTower is a regional skills anticipation mechanism for the tourism sector — a platform and methodology that enables VET providers, SMEs, policymakers, and regional authorities to continuously monitor skills needs, identify gaps, and make evidence-based decisions about training provision. It is coordinated by the Hellenic Open University (HOU) and operates within the broader TourX systemic impact framework (WP5).

The design logic of the WatchTower rests on a fundamental observation: most skills gap analysis in VET is retrospective and qualitative, based on expert opinion and literature review. What the tourism sector needs — and what VET systems rarely have — is current, quantitative, SME-level data on which specific competences are lacking in the actual workforce, how many workers are affected, and how urgently training is needed. The WatchTower was designed to fill this gap.

The system was built in a deliberate sequence, with each stage informing the next. The starting point was a systematic review of the TNA findings from T3.2 — mapping what was already known at sector level against the specific data requirements of a quantitative SME monitoring tool. This review identified where broad qualitative findings needed to be translated into measurable indicators, and where additional regional granularity was needed that the TNA had not captured. This step was not merely methodological housekeeping: it prevented duplication, ensured the WatchTower survey asked questions that the TNA had not already answered, and anchored the new instrument in the validated analytical framework already accepted by all TourX partners.

The second stage was the design and technical specification of the platform itself. The architecture decisions made here — open-source components, cloud-based scalable storage, role-based access controls, GDPR-compliant data handling, and a user interface designed for non-specialist stakeholders — reflect the same sustainability logic applied to the GSTS Box in D3.3: the system must be operable after the project ends, by people who are not data scientists, without ongoing external technical support. The reporting environment was designed to translate complex skills information into chart-based visualisations (pie, bar and box charts) that non-specialist users can interpret at a glance; radar/spider-type comparisons are not a built-in chart type but can be produced by authorised users from the exported data (CSV/Excel) for further analysis.

The third stage — survey design and focus group validation — was the most labour-intensive and the most critical. A skills needs survey that is not trusted by its respondents, or that asks questions that do not map onto the operational reality of small tourism businesses, will produce data that cannot be acted upon. Drawing on existing frameworks including those developed within the Pact for Skills, the survey instrument was designed and subsequently validated through an online focus group process involving sector representatives and VET experts. Participants were presented with both the platform and the survey content, providing structured feedback on the tool's functionality and the relevance and clarity of the questionnaire items. This dual validation — of the instrument and the platform simultaneously — ensured that the system as a whole was ready for deployment in a real operational context.

The result of this process is a system comprising three interdependent components:

- A validated Skills Needs Survey instrument, specifically designed for tourism SMEs, covering digital skills, green and sustainability competences, customer service skills, and emerging workforce needs. The instrument was developed and refined through an online focus group validation process, producing a questionnaire that is quantitative, regionally sensitive, and operationally realistic for SME respondents.

- A fully operational WatchTower platform, technically deployed with secure data storage, user access controls, data processing pipelines, and chart-based reporting views. The platform is capable of aggregating data from the survey with secondary data sources — labour market reports, regional government publications, and industry statistics — and presenting insights through interactive pie, bar and box charts, with underlying data exportable (CSV/Excel) for further analysis, e.g. radar/spider-type comparisons, by authorised users.
- A Comprehensive Methodology and Operations Guide, consolidating all procedures — survey design and distribution, data collection and processing, platform operation, reporting protocols, and quality assurance measures — into a single reference document. This guide enables any regional KT hub or VET provider to operate the WatchTower independently after the project period, using the open-access platform and validated instruments.

The survey instrument is designed to support repeated administration over time, allowing for longitudinal comparison of skills needs as the sector evolves. The platform's architecture was built for scalability, allowing for the addition of new data sources, new regions, and new skills indicators as the TourX network grows.

Phased Implementation Plan

Phase	Period	Key Activities	Lead
Phase 1 Immediate Rollout	2025–2026	Presentation of the WatchTower methodology and platform to TourX Network members and regional KT hubs; dissemination of the methodology guide and survey instrument as open-access resources; video presentation of platform functionality available to all partners.	HOU (P5)
Phase 2 Consolidation	2027–2028	Should partner organisations choose to initiate survey cycles, the platform and methodology are available to support deployment and data collection. HOU is available to provide methodological guidance upon request. Integration with secondary data sources is possible at regional discretion.	Regional KT Leads + HOU advisory
Phase 3 Sustainability	2029+	The WatchTower platform and methodology remain available for use by regional KT hubs and partner institutions at their own discretion. Any findings generated may be shared with relevant stakeholders through existing networks.	Regional KT Leads (HOU advisory)

2. Purpose and Objectives

Context

Skills anticipation in the tourism sector has historically relied on macro-level labour market analyses, expert forecasting, and employer surveys of limited scope. These approaches provide useful directional intelligence but cannot tell VET providers and regional training planners what specific competences are lacking in the workforce today, in which sub-sectors, in which proportions of the workforce, and with what urgency. This precision is what the WatchTower is designed to deliver.

The tourism sector's post-pandemic recovery has made this gap more consequential. The COVID-19 crisis accelerated structural shifts in the sector — towards digital service delivery, contactless operations, sustainable practices, and more personalised guest experiences — that have created new competence demands that pre-pandemic curricula did not anticipate. Many tourism SMEs are now operating with workforce skill profiles that are misaligned with what the market actually requires. VET providers, in turn, are making curriculum decisions without reliable data on the nature and scale of this misalignment. The WatchTower addresses this directly.

At European policy level, the WatchTower aligns with the Osnabrück Declaration's call for VET systems that are agile and responsive to labour market changes, and with the EU Skills Agenda's emphasis on skills intelligence as a precondition for effective VET policy. By building a transferable, regionally adaptable skills monitoring mechanism specifically for tourism, TourX contributes a sector-specific implementation of these European priorities.

Corrective Objectives

- Replace the absence of systematic, quantitative, SME-level skills gap data in tourism VET with a structured, validated, repeatable measurement instrument operating across all TourX partner regions. The WatchTower survey targets business owners, managers, HR representatives, and direct supervisors within tourism SMEs — the people with the most precise operational knowledge of day-to-day skills deficits in their workforce.
- Provide VET providers, regional authorities, and tourism SMEs with actionable, current data on workforce competence deficits — moving from assumption-based to evidence-based decisions about training priorities. The chart-based skills-gap visualisations provided by the WatchTower platform make findings immediately interpretable for non-specialist users, enabling decisions by regional authorities and VET providers who do not have in-house data analysis capacity.
- Establish a clear, documented linkage between skills gap data and curriculum development decisions. The WatchTower methodology guide includes a specific protocol for translating survey findings into learning objectives — ensuring that the data cycle closes into action rather than remaining as general intelligence that is noted and filed.
- Reduce the commercialisation of skills intelligence in the tourism sector. Access to detailed skills gap analysis for tourism SMEs is frequently offered through paid consultancy services or commercially operated platforms, placing it out of reach for small regional VET providers and micro-enterprises. The WatchTower provides equivalent functionality at no cost to any registered platform user.

Formative Objectives

- Build the capacity of regional KT hubs to operate the WatchTower survey cycle independently — recruiting SME respondents, distributing the survey, processing results, and generating regional reports — without dependence on HOU or external technical support.
- Create a longitudinal skills monitoring resource for the tourism sector that accumulates comparable data across annual cycles, enabling trend analysis and forward-looking skills forecasting at regional and cross-regional levels.
- Position the WatchTower as a transferable tool for emerging CoVEs and third-party VET providers beyond the TourX consortium, contributing to systemic impact across the European VET landscape.

SMART Objectives

SO1: It is proposed that the WatchTower platform and validated survey instrument be made available to all TourX Network members and interested regional partners. Should any partner region choose to deploy the survey, findings may be shared on the TourX platform at their discretion.



SO2: It is proposed that regional KT hubs be informed of the option to coordinate WatchTower survey cycles independently, using the operational platform and methodology guide. HOU is available to provide initial guidance where needed.

SO3: It is proposed that partner organisations using the WatchTower consider sharing their findings with relevant regional or national authorities, contributing to evidence-based workforce planning at their own discretion.

SO4: It is proposed that the WatchTower methodology and open-access platform be promoted to non-TourX VET providers and emerging CoVEs wishing to adapt the model for their own regional contexts.

Indicative Post-Project Indicators

The following indicators can serve as reference points for regional KT hubs and national stakeholders wishing to monitor the continuity and impact of the WatchTower. They are not centrally tracked by HOU but are available as a framework for self-assessment by regional coordinators:

- Number of regional KT hubs choosing to coordinate WatchTower survey cycles, at a frequency determined by each hub according to its own regional context and priorities.
- Number of tourism SMEs participating in any survey cycles conducted — as an indication of the system's reach within the sector.
- Number of regional or national documents, strategies, or planning processes that draw on WatchTower findings, where such use occurs at the initiative of the relevant organisation.

Post-Project Funding Orientations

The WatchTower platform is maintained by HOU as part of its institutional operations, providing partner organisations with secure access to the system and to their regional data. The analysis and dissemination of findings is the responsibility of each participating organisation within its own regional context, reflecting the decentralised governance model of the TourX Knowledge Triangle network. Any decision to conduct a survey cycle is taken at the level of the consortium or regional hub, based on local needs and priorities.

For partner organisations or regional authorities wishing to build on the WatchTower infrastructure within the framework of funded initiatives, the following pathways may be relevant:

- Erasmus+ and successor programmes: Future projects building on TourX outputs may incorporate WatchTower survey cycles as a monitoring and evaluation component, leveraging the validated instrument and operational platform already developed within the project.
- National VET agency partnerships: In countries where national VET agencies have an established interest in tourism sector skills intelligence, partner organisations may explore collaboration or co-funding arrangements through their existing institutional networks. EVTA and EVBB are well-positioned to facilitate these connections through their national member organisations.

3. Feasibility and Expected Impact

Institutional Feasibility

HOU has assumed technical responsibility for the WatchTower platform and will maintain it post-project as part of its institutional infrastructure. The platform is built on scalable, cloud-based architecture with established data security and GDPR compliance protocols, and requires no specialised technical staff for routine operation by regional users. Access is role-based, with different levels of functionality for survey administrators, data analysts, and read-only stakeholders.

The focus group validation process — conducted in each partner country during the survey design phase — has already established working relationships between the WatchTower team and regional industry representatives, VET experts, and tourism SMEs. These relationships provide the social infrastructure for ongoing survey deployment, reducing the cold-start problem that typically constrains post-project monitoring initiatives.

The primary operational requirement for annual survey cycles is the capacity of regional KT hubs to recruit SME respondents and distribute the survey — a task that falls within the normal scope of the relationship-management work that KT coordinators perform in any case. The platform automates the distribution, reminder, and data collection processes once a survey is initiated, minimising the administrative burden on regional coordinators.



What the WatchTower Has Produced

The development phase of the WatchTower has generated the following concrete outputs, which constitute the foundation for all post-project operation:

- A validated survey instrument for tourism SMEs, refined through country-level focus groups and piloted with a representative sample of regional businesses. The instrument covers digital skills, sustainability competences, customer service, and emerging workforce needs, with quantitative metrics (percentage of workforce affected, urgency of training need) and qualitative contextual questions.
- A fully operational platform with working data input interfaces, automated survey distribution and reminder workflows, data processing pipelines, and an interactive visualisation and reporting module (chart-based breakdowns, with full data export enabling further analysis, e.g. radar/spider-type comparisons, by authorised users).
- A Focus Group Report documenting the validation process, participant feedback, and the revisions made to the survey instrument based on regional input — providing a documented audit trail of the instrument's development and a reference for future iterations.
- A Methodology and Operations Guide consolidating all procedures for survey deployment, data processing, reporting, and platform management into a single operational reference.
- A data integration framework specifying how secondary data sources (labour market reports, regional statistics, industry publications) are imported, aligned with survey data, and incorporated into WatchTower reporting.

National Perspective — Regional Knowledge Triangle Intentions

Partner organisations within each regional Knowledge Triangle are encouraged to consider how the WatchTower methodology and platform may support their post-project activities, subject to agreement among the relevant partners in each region. The following outlines possible orientations at national and regional level:

- Greece / Attica Knowledge Triangle: Regional VET partners may draw on WatchTower data to inform dialogue with regional authorities on tourism workforce development. The validated instrument is available for any future skills monitoring initiative in the Attica region.
- Italy / Veneto Knowledge Triangle: ENAIP and regional partners may use the WatchTower platform to support evidence-based discussions with Veneto regional education and economic development authorities, and to contribute to national VET policy dialogue on tourism excellence.
- Spain / Canarias Knowledge Triangle: Partners may draw on the WatchTower methodology to support regional workforce planning discussions, particularly given the distinctive seasonal and international character of Canarian tourism and its implications for skills anticipation.
- Germany / Spree-Neisse Knowledge Triangle: Partners may consider using the WatchTower's sustainability skills indicators in the context of the region's tourism and hospitality sector planning, contributing to regional economic development dialogue.
- Portugal / University of Aveiro: The Portuguese partner may draw on the WatchTower platform in the context of HEI-level curriculum dialogue, connecting sector-level skills data to programme development at EQF 6–7 level.
- China: The Chinese partner (P23) may explore adaptation of the WatchTower survey instrument for the Chinese tourism SME context, with a view to informing EU–China skills dialogue and joint curriculum development initiatives.

Short-Term Impact (2025–2027)

- Platform and Methodology Presentation: The WatchTower methodology and platform will be presented to all TourX Network members and regional Knowledge Triangle hubs, providing a clear overview of the system's capabilities and how it can be used for regional tourism skills monitoring. This presentation constitutes the primary dissemination activity for the WatchTower within the project period, ensuring that all relevant partners are informed of the tool's availability and potential applications.
- Partner Deployment Support: Partner organisations wishing to deploy the survey instrument in their region may do so using the operational platform, with methodological support available from HOU upon request. The platform automates the technical aspects of data collection, allowing partner coordinators to focus on stakeholder engagement and regional outreach.
- Connection with GSTS Data: The platform's design allows for connection with D3.3 GSTS graduate outcome data, creating the conditions for a more complete picture of tourism workforce skills should both systems be used by partner organisations. This combination of employer-side and graduate-side intelligence represents a particularly valuable resource for evidence-based curriculum development.





- **Open-Access Availability:** The WatchTower model is available for adoption by third-party VET providers and emerging CoVEs wishing to conduct their own regional tourism skills monitoring, without licensing costs or dependence on TourX partners. Full documentation, including the validated survey instrument and methodology guide, is accessible through the TourX platform.

Long-Term Impact (2028+)

- A longitudinal dataset on tourism sector skills needs accumulating across annual survey cycles — enabling trend analysis, forward-looking skills forecasting, and cross-regional comparison at a granularity that does not currently exist at European level for tourism VET.
- Integration with European skills monitoring frameworks: EVBB and EVTA may explore opportunities to connect the WatchTower model with broader EU skills intelligence initiatives where relevant and feasible.
- Replication by emerging CoVEs and VET providers beyond the TourX network, using the open-access platform and validated methodology to conduct their own regional skills monitoring.
- Policy influence: WatchTower data feeding into national VET quality frameworks and regional tourism development strategies via EVTA and EVBB policy networks.

4. Critical Success Factors and Dependencies

Internal Factors

- **SME participation** in any survey cycles conducted is a key factor for the quality of findings. The validated instrument and platform are available to support partner organisations wishing to engage tourism businesses in their region. The platform's automated reminder system and the brevity of the survey (designed for completion in under 15 minutes) reduce the practical burden on both coordinators and respondents.
- **Platform Availability:** The WatchTower platform is maintained by HOU as part of its institutional operations. The open-source components of the platform reduce dependency on any single vendor, and the documented technical specifications enable migration to alternative hosting if needed.
- **Regional coordinator capacity.** Should a survey cycle be initiated, partner organisations are encouraged to designate a local coordinator to manage the process. The platform automates the technical aspects of data collection, minimising the coordination effort required.

External Factors

- **Tourism SME engagement** is subject to seasonal pressures in the tourism sector: response rates are likely to be lower during peak tourism season. Survey cycles should be scheduled for shoulder seasons (spring or autumn) to maximise participation.
- **Secondary data availability** varies across partner countries. The data integration framework accommodates this variability — regions with richer secondary data sources can produce more enriched WatchTower reports, while regions with limited secondary data rely more heavily on primary survey findings.
- **Policy alignment:** the utility of WatchTower data for national VET policy depends on engagement with national VET agencies. EVTA and EVBB will facilitate this engagement through their policy networks.

How the WatchTower Connects to Other TourX Deliverables

The WatchTower is designed as the demand-side intelligence engine of the TourX ecosystem — providing the sector-facing, SME-sourced data that the other deliverables need to remain relevant and current. The connections are bidirectional:

Connected Deliverable	What the WatchTower provides	What it receives in return
D3.2 — Upskilling/Reskilling Box (TNA)	Quantitative, SME-level skills gap data that complements and validates the qualitative TNA findings at sector level.	Baseline sector knowledge and qualitative framing that informs WatchTower survey design and indicator selection.
D3.3 — Quality and GSTS Box	Labour market demand data (what employers need) to contextualise graduate outcome data (what	Graduate employment and skills relevance data that enriches the WatchTower's supply-side picture.



	graduates are doing).	
D5.1 — Policy Recommendations	Evidence-based, quantified skills gap data and chart-based visualisations — with radar/spider-type comparisons available by data export for authorised users — that ground policy recommendations in measurable reality.	Policy framing and stakeholder consultation findings that help interpret WatchTower data in its broader regulatory and funding context.
D5.3 — VET Excellence Validation Mechanism	Regional benchmarks and real-time skills demand data that define what 'excellence' means in terms of labour market responsiveness.	Institutional performance data that can be cross-referenced with WatchTower skills gap findings to assess VET provider effectiveness.

5. Rollout, Visibility, and Dissemination

European Level

EVBB and EVTA may present the WatchTower model at relevant European VET forums, positioning it as a transferable regional skills monitoring tool within the EU VET landscape. Any further engagement with European skills intelligence initiatives will be explored at their discretion and subject to available opportunities.

National and Regional Level

At national and regional level, partner organisations are encouraged to share information on the WatchTower methodology and platform with relevant authorities and stakeholders within their own contexts. The validated survey instrument and operational platform are available as a ready-to-use resource for any regional authority or VET provider wishing to initiate a skills monitoring cycle. Any dissemination of findings from future survey cycles remains at the discretion of the conducting organisation.

International Level

The Chinese partner (P23) will adapt the WatchTower survey instrument to the Chinese tourism SME context within the EU–China PPP VET investment framework, generating comparative data on tourism sector skills needs across EU and Chinese regional contexts.

Dissemination Activities

- **Platform and Methodology Access:** The WatchTower platform and validated survey instrument are publicly accessible to all registered TourX Network members. Any VET provider or regional authority wishing to draw on the methodology for their own purposes may access the full documentation through the TourX platform.
- **Partner Dissemination:** Partner organisations are encouraged to share the WatchTower methodology and platform availability within their own national and regional networks. Any findings generated through independent survey cycles remain the property of the conducting organisation, to be disseminated at their own discretion.
- **Methodological Support:** HOU is available to provide methodological guidance to any partner organisation or third party wishing to adapt the WatchTower model for their own regional context. This support is offered on a best-efforts basis and does not involve HOU assuming operational responsibility for any external survey cycles.
- **European Visibility:** The WatchTower methodology and platform will be presented through the project's standard dissemination channels, including relevant European VET networks. EVTA and EVBB may facilitate connections with broader European skills intelligence initiatives where appropriate and at their own discretion.

References and source framework

[1] HOU, Final Methodology for Implementation of WP5 — Task 5.2, 14 February 2025.

[2] AKMI, TOUR-X D2.3 Long-Term Action Plan (2026), Chapter 12 — D5.2 Skills WatchTower.