



# Final Conference Event Report

22<sup>nd</sup> September 2016, Navan, Meath

Report prepared by Meath Partnership

<b>Project Title:</b>	Harnessing the Learning Assets within the SME Business Community
<b>Project Acronym:</b>	SYNERGY
<b>Project Number:</b>	2014-1-IE01-KA202_000355

The *SYNERGY: Harnessing the Learning Assets within the SME Business Community* Final Conference took place on Thursday, 22<sup>nd</sup> September 2016 in the Ardboyne Hotel, Navan, Co. Meath, Ireland. It coincided with the launch of the LEADER Programme also.

The purpose of the final conference was to showcase the results of the SYNERGY Project and to further exploit the intellectual outputs developed over the 24 months of the project lifetime. The Final Conference also provided a forum for start-up entrepreneurs, business owners and VET professionals to network with local stakeholders, as well as international and national experts, in the field of business creation, training & development and mentoring supports. The event was also attended by national policy makers providing an opportunity for project partners to discuss the exploitation potential of the SYNERGY approach with these stakeholders, outlining the recommendations contained within the project's Policy Paper.

The conference was attended by 123 participants representing all facets of the business community, including mentoring and support agencies, funding agencies, academic experts and facilitators of entrepreneurship education, policy makers, adult education professionals, nascent entrepreneurs, established micro-enterprise owners, political representatives from local government and representatives of local business networks.

In total, the conference invitation was circulated to a database of over 500 individuals and entities raising awareness of the benefit of the SYNERGY model to VET professionals and business owners and their representatives.

This report is a short synopsis of the proceedings of the Conference. The working language of the conference was English.



## Conference Proceedings

The Final Conference was opened by Mr. Michael Ludlow, Chief Executive Officer of Meath Partnership, who welcomed everyone for attending and participating in the Conference, and thanked the speakers and business owners for their support in organising this event. Mr Ludlow explained that the SYNERGY Project brought together the world of education and the world of enterprise in a way that heretofore had not been tested in Meath or in many communities across Europe. Mr. Ludlow explained that by working with micro-enterprise business owners and VET trainers the SYNERGY consortium began to shape a



programme of support that balanced the theory of enterprise and entrepreneurship with the realities on the ground. Mr. Ludlow concluded by stating that he was hopeful that the SYENERGY Project would contribute to the growing recognition of the value of SMEs to our local and national economy, both from a practical and policy perspective and then welcomed MEP Ms. Marian Harkin, and invited her to address the delegates.



The opening address of the conference was delivered by MEP Ms. Marian Harkin. In her speech, Ms. Harkin highlighted the role of the EU in supporting investment in innovative projects to bring an enterprise culture to education and vice versa and also spoke about the role of EU-funded programmes and the opportunities for international cooperation that are available and should be encouraged and taken up. She highlighted the role of industry in

communicating their needs and working with the education system. She gave several examples of sectors working with educational institutions and the benefits that accrue across Europe.

### ***The SYENERGY Experience: Project Presentation***



As the Project Co-ordinator, Ms Jennifer Land presented the SYENERGY Project to the conference audience and began by sharing the aims and objectives of the project, setting out what the project consortium had hoped to achieve in September 2014, and how much these aspirations has been realised. Charting the highs and lows of the project and sharing some of the lessons learned, Jennifer brought the delegates through the main outputs and products of the project and informed them that copies of all outputs were available on the USB key in their packs and on the project website should they require additional information. Jennifer then provided a review of the SYENERGY Exchange Platform and highlighted a sample of the mini-learning resources available to registered users. The core elements of the project were highlighted in the presentation and Jennifer finished by thanking all the organisations, individuals and contributors at local level in the all partner countries for their overwhelming input, insights, commitment and

energy which greatly assisted in the delivery of the SYENERGY project.



### ***Partnership for Prosperity: Presentation of the Policy Paper***

Ms. Mary Baker presented the Policy Paper developed within the framework of the SYNERGY project. Ms. Baker began by outlining that discussion regarding the importance of finding new approaches to SME training supports in Europe, and the importance of fostering the growth in micro-enterprises, the engine room of the EU economy, to safeguard the economic future of Europe. Ms. Baker proposed that SYNERGY has created a new approach to business education driven through a collaborative process that engaged both business owners and VET professionals simultaneously; which is directly linked to the policy directives of the European Union. With specific mention to the Europe 2020 Strategy and the Entrepreneurship and Innovation Programme (EIP) supported by the European Union, Ms. Baker's presentation centred on the ways in which the SYNERGY approach directly address the current EU policy on entrepreneurship education, and then provided an overview on how these policies can be supported by the work of the SYNERGY consortium. A printed copy of the policy paper was provided to all delegates and is also available for download through the project website.

### ***Networking Event***

To encourage and support the networking opportunities presented by this Final Conference, following the presentations, there was an opportunity to meet and greet for all delegates. It was at this point that policy makers and VET organisations had the opportunity to interact directly with the business community, and was one of the biggest successes of the event, as business owners had the opportunity to speak with experts in the field of business development as well as with successful entrepreneurs who have recently been through the process of establishing their own business in a challenging economic climate.



### ***Conference Close***

The Conference was closed by Ms. Jennifer Land who added some concluding remarks and thanked everyone for the participation and presence at the Conference. Copies of available presentations are provided with this report, along with the delegate sign-in sheets.

