

Partnership for Prosperity: SYNERGY Policy Paper

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How Important are SMEs in Europe

SMEs are the backbone of the European Union's economy and society

They represent 99.8%, or 22.3 million, of EU28 enterprises.

They contribute to the overall Gross Value Added with 57.5%

GVA of SMEs ranges from 50.1% in Poland to 74.9% in Estonia.

In 2012, SMEs employed 67% of the full-time workforce of the EU (from 53% in UK to 86.5% Greece)

In 2012, 2.3 million new enterprises were founded in the EU, 70.8% as sole entrepreneurs

On average, every km² of land in the EU houses five SMEs

These figures underline the significance of SMEs to the European economy.

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Rationale for SYNERGY

Why is there a need for a project like SYNERGY?

- ❖ Safeguarding the well-being, innovativeness and competitiveness of SMEs in Europe means safeguarding Europe's future.
- ❖ In a knowledge-based, smart economy like Europe's, the need to ensure the provision of relevant and quality up-skilling opportunities to the SME sector is paramount.
- ❖ Relevant and timely up-skilling opportunities are necessary to improve performance, to achieve competitive advantages, to foster employability and to increase earning.
- ❖ In contrast, a low level of participation in continuous training and development activities hinders progress, innovation and the creation of competitive advantages.



Rationale for SYNERGY

Informal learning - a viable pathway to training for SMEs

❖ Recent literature and studies identified the following barriers to training for SMEs:

1. Attending training is too time- and/or cost-intensive;
2. Attending training can see a drop in production;
3. Suitable training and development opportunities are lacking and insufficiently adapted to the training needs of employees and owners;
4. Lack of consideration with regard to the topic – there is a lack of awareness regarding existing needs in SMEs;
5. Risk of poaching medium and high skilled workers if they are up-skilled by their current employer
6. “Informal learning is as important as formal learning” (ibid. p.14), and it can help to overcome the afore-mentioned barriers, as informal measures are often more time- and cost-efficient.



SYNERGY Pilots a New Approach

How is VET different with SYNERGY?

- ❖ The SYNERGY consortium understands that developing a learning culture among micro-enterprises has been a real challenge that still requires concerted interventions at practice and policy levels.
- ❖ But we also know that in a rapidly developing and changing global market the need for appropriate, on-going interaction between businesses and VET providers is critical.
- ❖ Through our approach, we aimed to improve the quality and relevance of training provision to business owners by producing a suite of research-informed 'mini-learning' resources that use audio-visual based training to address identified gaps in existing learning content provision.
- ❖ To implement its innovative approach in tackling the issue of inadequate VET provision for the European SME community, we conducted research, designed a guideline for producing mini-learning resources, and developed www.synergyexchange.eu bringing SMEs and trainers together.



the SYNERGY project team undertook to develop, populate with content and disseminate Synergyexchange.eu as our bespoke online learning and social networking platform; purpose-built to foster networking and to allow the exchange

SYNERGY Pilots a New Approach

How is VET different with SYNERGY?

- ❖ The SYNERGY project team undertook to develop, populate with content and disseminate the SYNERGY Exchange as our bespoke online learning and social networking platform.
- ❖ This purpose-built platform is effective in fostering networking and to allowing the exchange of knowledge between not only VET and SMEs, but also between co-workers, peers and experts, both internal and external to Europe's SMEs.
- ❖ This platform allows for the establishment of mentoring relationships among groups of participants and encourages peer-learning partnership to develop between like-minded MEOs with expertise and experience to share.
- ❖ The platform also provides interactive learning opportunities and the use of a bespoke online course creation tools which allows VET tutors and MEOs alike to create innovative new content as a gap emerges or a need is identified.
- ❖ Finally, our approach and the SYNERGY Exchange ensures the all SYNERGY target group members have ongoing to access relevant, bite-sized training courses.



Effectiveness of SYNERGY Approach

How did SYNERGY Partners ensure their Approach to VET would work?



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 Erasmus+
With the support of the
Erasmus+ programme
of the European Union

SYNERGY Approach in Policy

The SYNERGY Policy Paper

- ❖ The Policy Paper demonstrates how project outcomes are relevant to the project target groups and to the wider European community, and provides recommendations for future activities in this field.
- ❖ The Paper delivers arguments based on a review of recent literature, scientific evidence and the experiences of the SYNERGY project team, local sub-group members and associated stakeholders.
- ❖ The Paper addresses both national and European policy makers, as well as practitioners working in both the VET and SME sectors; and reflects the experiences of this project consortium in attempting to put into practice these innovative policy objectives.
- ❖ The Policy Paper is available to view and download from www.projectsynergy.eu



SYNERGY Approach in Policy

SYNERGY Policy Recommendations

- ❖ From our experience of working with the VET and SME sectors, the SYNERGY project team wanted to bring about change in two primary areas concerning VET policy and practice in terms of providing education and training opportunities for SMEs.

- ❖ Based on our experience of delivering the SYNERGY project, the partners agreed on two primary policy recommendations:
 1. Peer-to-peer learning, e-learning and micro-learning techniques should be fostered to make VET provision more accessible, relevant and suitable to the needs of the SME business community;
 2. Initial and continuing education for VET professionals should include coaching in e-didactics, so that comprehensive, concise and industry-relevant training courses and resources can be developed by VET professionals as part of their mainstream service offering.



Policy Recommendations in Context

How do the SYNERGY Policy Recommendations link to Erasmus+ Programme Objectives?

1) Developing partnerships between education and employment

The Project has actively engaged with both MEOs and VET providers and provided a framework through which partnerships can be established by these organisations now and in the future.

2) Revising and strengthening the professional profile of the teaching professions

The resources developed and training delivered have represented a professional approach to the delivery of training and support to MEOs. Adopting e-learning techniques represents a new approach for many VET professionals however it may require a longer period of monitoring to establish if the profile of the professions has been strengthened.



Policy Recommendations in Context

How do the SYNERGY Policy Recommendations link to EU policy directives?

- ❖ In Europe 2020, the European Commission presents a strategy paper that focuses on economic growth for the coming decade. In this paper, the importance of providing viable education and training opportunities for Europe's SMEs, to secure the future of Europe's smart, sustainable economy, is emphasised.
- ❖ This strategy identifies and focuses on three fields where Europe will have to act in the future. These include:
 1. Innovation and Research and Development
 2. Education, Training and Lifelong Learning
 3. Digital Society
- ❖ Similarly the Entrepreneurship and Innovation Programmes (EIP) seeks to support innovation in the SME sector by encouraging networking between SMEs across all EU Member States and working in partnership with policy-makers to enhance supports to SMEs in Europe

Both of these policy directives can be linked to our Policy Recommendations.



Lessons Learned from SYNERGY

How can our experience support others to adopt this approach?

- ❖ **Experience:** At the end of the SYNERGY project implementation, project partners consider fostering robust relationships with target group members as the single most effective means of ensuring buy-in from target audiences and achieving project objectives.
- ❖ **Recommendation:** If approaching the target group members again to become involved in such a project, first design a framework which would govern the interaction with both MEOs and VET professionals, and which would clearly outline the benefits and merits of their participation in the project for both parties.



Lessons Learned from SYNERGY

How can our experience support others to adopt this approach?

- ❖ **Experience:** Both micro-enterprise owners and VET professionals need to feel supported in their daily work and providing this support is the responsibility of the project partners. Such support was provided for by partners throughout the project implementation and included providing a broad suite of bespoke training materials, providing up-skilling opportunities to support target groups to adapt to each other's needs and providing technical support for using the SYNERGY Exchange platform.
- ❖ **Recommendation:** Learning objectives of the training programmes should be designed in partnership between the partners and the target group members. This would safeguard the relevance of the training programmes, and foster a willingness from the target groups to participate in the training because it is responding directly to their needs.



Lessons Learned from SYNERGY

How can our experience support others to adopt this approach?

- ❖ **Experience:** Up-skilling VET professionals to become competent and confident e-tutors, and to feel comfortable working with micro-learning techniques and technologies, has been proven to be an effective means of providing time and cost-effective, relevant training to MEOs and the SME Community in Europe.
- ❖ **Recommendation:** Training outlines, templates and handbooks should be provided to VET professionals earlier in the project to support them to create their own mini-learning resources; and also more workshops should be delivered to VET professionals with a focus on familiarising tutors with best practices in e-learning and micro-learning techniques, and providing them with technical support for creating mini-learning format resources.



Lessons Learned from SYNERGY

How can our experience support others to adopt this approach?

- ❖ **Experience:** Throughout the implementation phase, we worked with clusters of business interests and found that business owners from within certain business sectors shared common and similar training requirements, but from the outset of the project, we had determined that we would target multi-sectoral business owners from within micro-enterprises and SMEs.
- ❖ **Recommendation:** From our experience we would recommend that when introducing the concept of micro-learning and developing mini-learning resources for this target group, that a sectoral approach i.e. food, craft, services, ICT etc. might be a more pragmatic and successful approach. If this sectoral approach had have been adopted from the start of the project, our portfolio of mini-learning resources might have been more targeted to specific business interests.



Thank You for your Interest and Attention

Any Questions?



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