



The role of the network, Businet in incubating Erasmus Plus KA2 Innovation Partnerships.

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This article will introduce the network, Businet and its instrumental role in the development of three Erasmus+ projects. Networks are fundamental to these innovation partnerships because of the dissemination and exploitation opportunities provided. This can obviously amplify the successful outputs and outcomes of the projects. Businet is a network of international higher education institutes that share a common ethos regarding internationalization. Businet provides an environment that encourages the sharing of good practice and encourages co-operation between like-minded individuals and like-minded organisations.

The work of Businet benefits the member institutes themselves, the staff of those member institutes as well as the students. A unique feature of the organisation is that the needs of specific curriculum areas within member institutes are addressed within these groups and are referred to as curriculum working groups and special interest working groups

The Third Way is a project that began in 2019 and was developed to improve communication and knowledge sharing between the vocational and higher education sector and social enterprises. The project has the primary aim to create innovative and accessible learning programmes that support understanding and awareness of social enterprise. At the heart of the project proposal is the development of a new curriculum pathway for students from business subjects wishing to become social entrepreneurs and/ or create or work within social enterprises.

The project proposal was devised during a workshop at the Businet conference in Vilamoura, Portugal in November 2018. It has the broad aim of narrowing the divide between traditional business curricula in Vocational and Higher Education and the growing sector of social enterprises. While across Europe more and more young people are turning to social enterprises, this partnership is keen to recognise this and



support and inform their choices and lead them towards this ‘Third Way’ of doing business.

The five university partners work with three social enterprises to produce a curriculum model and MOOC that offers information about social enterprise, for social enterprise and provides learning through social enterprise. Also the devised curriculum will stand alone as a ‘face to face’ programme of study delivered via a series of interactive workshops. This project represents a serious attempt to ensure social enterprise becomes an integrated component of the higher education business curriculum. It will also support the social enterprise sector to recruit from a pool of graduates with the required sector-specific skills.

An essential outcome of the project proposed is knowledge sharing and the potential for access to greater mobility across the EU alongside the formal recognition of the proposed lifelong learning, which again this project will bring about. New initiatives in the business curriculum will support models for social businesses and will be generated through this proposed initiative.

The curriculum structure has been developed after a survey of social enterprises that had over 200 respondents, as well as two face-to-face focus groups. It will include ‘modules’ that deal with Leadership, Project Management, Funding & Tendering, Marketing, Finance Management, Governance and Business Strategy. Once the curriculum is developed, the final task is to support a thematic network and pan-European internships within social enterprises for undergraduates.

Recent research and publications have publicised the relationship between entrepreneurship and various mental illnesses. This was brought to international attention by a range of presentations to the World Economic Forum (WEF) in Davos in 2019. Entrepreneurs provide economic benefit to any society in which they operate yet little consideration has been given to their mental well-being (MWB) in an increasingly challenging business environment. This is the impetus for the development of the **Entre-MWB** project.



These are real concerns as the nature of employment across Europe and globally are changing towards an emphasis on microbusinesses and enterprise relying on more and more young people setting up start-up companies. According to a study presented at WEF, approximately one half of entrepreneurs suffer from at least one form of mental health condition during their lifetimes. The project seeks to support young entrepreneurs across Europe and to ensure the effectiveness and efficiency of start-ups by developing supportive educational materials that encourage reflection, understanding, ensure mental resilience, are non-judgemental and are directly supportive of their health and well being. A curriculum and proactive and interactive training materials will be developed, using case studies and real life experience, which will be accessible 24/7 via VLEs and a MOOC.

The partnership is made up of three universities, two SMEs, two associations and two social enterprises, organised into three clusters (HE/ enterprise/ dissemination) to implement the project outputs. This project will make an innovative contribution to the MWB of entrepreneurs, which is innovative for an Erasmus+ project. The focus of innovation is to provide unique self-help and self supportive training materials that will (1) support young entrepreneurs in understanding the qualitative dimension of entrepreneurship; (2) prepare young start-ups for the challenges and demands of entrepreneurship in advance and (3) provide a resource that can add value to an existing vocational programme of business and/ or enterprise studies and (4) add value to current business start-up support.

The final training materials are relevant to the needs of entrepreneurs and the directors of new start enterprises, and will be determined by entrepreneurs. There will be focus groups and surveys aimed at entrepreneurs that will confirm the nature of the learning and training materials. The final outputs will be available to start-up and would-be entrepreneurs, business and enterprise undergraduates and alumni, and will be made available to partners and associated partners that provide business support to start-up companies. The curriculum content will also remain available via the *Powerhub Talent* VLE as hosted by Mediasphere and via the MOOC developed by the university partners within this partnership.



Skills Campus is a proposal involving five universities and a range of associate partners, submitted in May 2021, devised during a virtual workshop at an online Businet conference in September 2020. It has the broad aim of developing the digital skills of teachers and lecturers of business subjects, including the technical and instructional design skills necessary to produce a high quality VLE, MOOC and other forms of online learning. The project is in line with the new strategic direction of the EU: Digital Europe and Green Europe.

The proposal requires the universities with a focus on both vocational and higher level business education to develop the technical and design skills to produce high quality online materials, digital learning resources and lesson delivery to enhance learning online that enable both short programmes and mainstream curriculum to be available 24/7 and to reach a wide range of students studying business and related subjects. Curriculum materials for business undergraduates developed in partnership within the Businet network as face-to-face transnational *busidays* events will be made accessible as part of the Internationalisation at Home (I@H) initiative.

This project does not just target vocational and undergraduate students and graduates but also those teachers and lecturers that are delivering business related training programmes in higher education institutions. The proposed MOOCs will make available a wide range of stand-alone learning experiences and the partnership will develop a series of interactive workshops to promote digital skills and knowledge, including instructional design, video-editing, audio production and use of appropriate software.

This project represents a serious attempt to promote and extend the boundaries of MOOC and VLE development to become an integrated component of the professional development of staff in higher and vocational education. The result of the project is an integrated pan-European approach to the digitisation of educational programmes and the promotion of inclusive and digital access and development of online pedagogic skills accessible via the skills campus and the thematic network, DigiNet that will operate within the ‘umbrella’ network, Businet.



In line with Businet's I@H policy, the project will encourage and support learners to access short *busidays* programmes and collaborative events. The project will make the developed *busidays* curriculum available in various digital forms, as well as using digital communication platforms for delivery. The on-going digitisation of mainstream business curricula will develop as a consequence, professional development training materials that support teachers and lecturers to produce high quality digitised and online learning materials and initiate the online skills campus and DigiNet thematic network.

The proposal enables learners linked to business qualifications and other related VET and HE programmes to obtain a broader range of learning experiences and competences in the field of digital learning and the acquisition of green and transversal skills which can be accumulated as part of a growing accreditation of micro-credentials. Crucially the longer-term aspiration is to ensure an increased digital competency amongst educators.

The involvement of the network, Businet has been essential to the development of these projects in three key areas: (1) bringing together the core partners for each project; (2) developing the project idea in the curriculum working groups and (3) ensuring that there is a route for dissemination and an opportunity for exploitation.

(1,470 words)

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