

# SUPPORT: SME University Partnership Online Resource & Training

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## Keywords

Learning Resource, Knowledge Transfer, Partnership, Break Down Barriers.

## ABSTRACT

The SUPPORT project is a Multilateral ERASMUS project from the Lifelong Learning Programme, funded with support from the European Commission.

There still exist barriers that prevent the fruitful collaboration between Small Medium Enterprise (SME) and Higher Education Institutions (HEI). The SUPPORT project, tries to break some of these barriers through the development of free learning resources which will promote the collaboration, partnership and knowledge transfer.

## 1. INTRODUCTION

SME makes an important contribution to the dynamism and innovative performance of European economy, thus enhancing economic growth especially in the medium and long term. HEI is responsible of the education & research and have great successful results that could help SME to innovate. However, the gap between SME and HEI still prevents this from happening. The SUPPORT project objective is to understanding the learning needs of SME staff, SME support providers and HEI with regards to improving and increasing cooperation and collaboration between SME and HEI. In line with the learning needs analysis, a training resource pack is being developed, which will become a starting point for development of learning materials. Those materials will be transferred into an intuitive, effective e-learning format for incorporation into the website in five partner languages.

## 2. MOTIVATION

SME are the backbone of the EU economy. Their prosperity is a crucial factor for achieving more growth and more and better jobs in the EU. They are vital to fulfilling the goal of a more equal and productive society with higher social and economic integration. Yet they are often poorly equipped to fulfil their potential as innovators, especially in the relentless transition to a knowledge based society, both because of their diverse academic backgrounds and their lack of training.

As what has been referred to as the European Paradox suggests, investments in knowledge is no panacea for curing stagnant economic growth and persistent levels of high unemployment. Rather, mechanisms are needed to ensure that such costly investments in new knowledge, which form the basis for economic growth in a globalised economy, actually spill over for commercialisation & innovative activity. By serving as a key conduit for the spill-over of knowledge, SME provide an important link to economic growth (Carree et al., 2002).

A key element within the Commission Communication (2006), was that universities should develop structured partnerships with the world of enterprise in order to "become significant players in the economy, able to respond better and faster to the demands of the market and to develop partnerships which harness scientific and technological knowledge".

This project provides a cost effective and focussed way of introducing good practice and innovation into their business processes which will impact directly on the quality of life of the people who are employed within the SME themselves and the communities they serve.

The aim of SUPORT is clear, to develop resources which enables SME to break down barriers & gain access to dormant research at HEI & allow universities to find outlets for current and previous research, making them more responsive to current market needs.

### **3. APPROACH**

To carry out the objectives of the SUPORT project will:

- Identify the barriers that SME face when trying to access HEI research, the training needs of growth orientated SME who wish to innovative, particularly with regard to the commercialisation of applied research.
- Identify the barriers & training needs that HEI staffs have in accessing and engaging SME in their research projects.
- Design and produce a handy roadmap, outlining the routes SME should take to access HEI' applied research, & the routes HEI should take to access SME.
- Design & produce a training course for delivery to SME and HEI students as part of business studies programmes.
- Design & produce a complementary web-site, directly targeting SME offering "bite-sized versions" of the full course.
- Pilot test the training resource with target users.
- Promote the resources to maximise uptake, by entrepreneurs and also by SME support bodies and HEI
- Carry out an evaluation of the project, to feedback into future policy and practice and sustained collaboration between SME, the SME support profession and HEI.

### **4. RESULTS**

As a result of the project

- The barriers entrepreneurs & HEI face when trying engaging with each other will be mapped & disseminated to the HEI & SME support sectors.
- Entrepreneurs will be provided with the specific skills/knowledge to innovate, grow and develop their business by taking advantage of the research that often lies dormant in HEI.
- HEI staff will gain a deeper understanding of how SME function, & on how to access & involve them.
- SME access to the course will be highly accessible, promoting innovation & ac culture of lifelong learning.
- The development of a community of HEI working with SME promotes innovation.

### **5. CONCLUSIONS**

SUPPORT will impact on SME trainers and educators, and on HEI staff & students; improving the quality and attractiveness of their training and its effectiveness in incorporating transversal skills such as innovation, creativity and entrepreneurship. This in turn, will have a positive effect on the SME innovation capacity, relevance and take up of EU funded HEI research, and employability of the young adults, improving European competitiveness and social cohesion.

### **REFERENCES**

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