



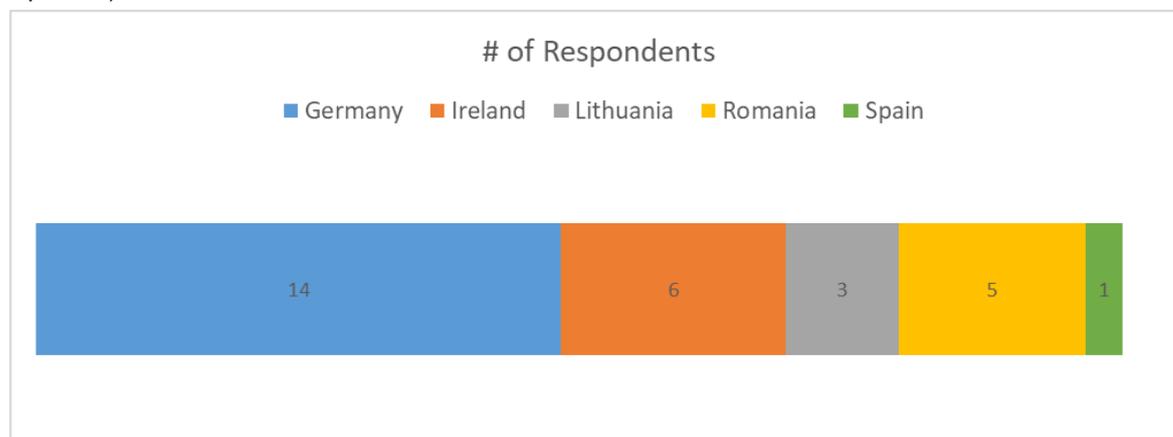
Title of the project: Practice based research to enhance the innovation capacity of SMEs through learning and ICT supported collaboration
Key Action: Cooperation for innovation and the exchange of good practices
Action: Strategic Partnerships
Field most impacted: Strategic Partnerships for vocational education and training
Main objective of the project: Development of Innovation

Newsletter No 10 / 2019

ReInnovate a key element for innovation, training and formation

Learner satisfaction survey

In total 29 learners completed the Learner Satisfaction Survey (Germany=14; Ireland=6; Lithuania=3; Romania=5; Spain=1).



A detailed report outlining the responses across all countries (with all respondents included) and also detailed by individual country is available in the Learner Satisfaction Survey Summary Report.

The programme

- 100% of participants agreed that the course programme was enjoyable (38%=strongly agreed; 62%=agreed).
- 100% of participants agreed that the course programme was useful (41%=strongly agreed; 59%=agreed).
- 97% of participants agreed that the course resources were helpful to them (45%=strongly agreed; 52%=agreed), 3% gave a neutral response.
- 100% of participants agreed that the course learning material was helpful to them (45%=strongly agreed; 55%=agreed).
- All participants felt that having completed the programme their skills and knowledge had increased (17%=a great deal; 66%=a lot; 14%=a moderate amount; and 3%=a little).
- When asked to indicate a preference for the type of learning materials 34% preferred video, 34% preferred text and 31% preferred slides.

ICT platform

- All participants agreed that the ICT platform was easy to use (41%=strongly agreed; 59%=agreed).
- 97% of participants agreed that the ICT platform effectively supported their learning (38%=strongly agreed; 59%=agreed), 3% gave a neutral response.
- 97% of participants agreed that the ICT platform enabled them to complete each step of the programme (38%=strongly agreed; 59%=agreed), 3% gave a neutral response.
- 58% of participants agreed that the ICT platform allowed them to collaborate with others (34%=strongly agreed; 24%=agreed), 38% gave a neutral response whilst 3% of participants disagreed.
- 97% of participants agreed that the ICT platform provided the necessary support materials (45%=strongly agreed; 52%=agreed), 3% gave a neutral response.
- 97% of participants agreed that the ICT platform contained the necessary features to support their learning (31%=strongly agreed; 66%=agreed), 3% gave a neutral response.

When asked to identify what was most useful about the programme 23% of participants noted learning content and examples, 13% noted the variety of learning material, whilst 10% stated that finding and using data was the most useful.

When asked to identify what was least useful about the programme 16 participants responded, with 56% noted that there were too many theoretical terms and 25% noted that there were too many activities.

When asked about obstacles that were encountered during the programme an overwhelming majority, 57% noted the Covid-19 restrictions in relation to their workplace.

When asked how the programme provided benefits to their organisations, 29% noted improved the productivity of the process, 16% noted improved quality of a product, 16% noted that it solved a long standing problem, and 10% noted reduced number of defects in product/process.

When asked to describe how the programme could be improved 29% of respondents suggested adding more videos, 19% suggested adding more group work and 14% suggested adding further SME examples.

Ireland

Following a content analysis of both the learner interviews (n=3) and the reflective learning journals (n=10) in order to examine how the learners perceived the programme and the ICT platform, several themes emerged and are described hereunder:

Obstacles - There were challenges and obstacles faced by the participants during the programme. The main obstacle mentioned by the majority was the effect of the Covid-19 crisis on their research. Many experienced difficulties as the input of their colleagues and access to relevant data was not as readily available to them whilst not physically in the workplace. Whilst referring to the Covid-19 crisis as having hindered their progress participants adapted their project ideas to take account of this.

Skill acquisition - The programme provided learners with several professional and personal benefits in terms of knowledge and skill acquisition, with all participants noting an improvement in their knowledge and skill level through participation in the programme.

Communication skills - The majority of respondents noted that the programme helped them develop and improve their communication skills, noting an increased level of confidence in their ability to communicate in the workplace. One respondent noted that prior to the programme they had difficulty expressing their ideas in the workplace and they now have more confidence that can communicate these effectively.

Research skills - An increase in research skills was mentioned by many of the respondents, where the programme encouraged a structured approach to working on their ideas. Many identified the Research Approaches unit, within the Using Research to Identify Future Opportunities Module, as particularly helpful, citing the development of their research proposal and the clear stepped approach to working on their researching ideas.

Data analysis skills - An increase in knowledge and skills in relation to data analysis was noted by several of the participants. There was an increased understanding of decision making within their workplace and the importance of data and its analysis to the presentation of their research and ideas.

Teamwork skills - Teamwork skills was another particular skill which participants felt had improved as a result of the programme.

Project management skills - Participants felt that their project management skills had improved as a result of the programme.

Time management skills - Improvement in their time management skills was also noted by participants and the tools and techniques particularly mentioned including the time management matrix, Lotus diagram and Gantt charts were thought to have helped greatly in developing this skill.

Self-directed learning - Following the programme several participants noted that they wished to continue their learning journey and that the programme had given them confidence to seek learning opportunities in the future to continue their professional development.

Critical thinking skills - Participants noted increasing their critical thinking skills.

Problem solving skills - Problem solving skills increased through participation and the structured and analytical approach promoted in the programme was highlighted as key in this area.

Leadership skills - One participant spoke of increased confidence in their leadership skills having completed the programme.

ICT platform & online delivery - All participants were particularly positive about the online nature of the programme, with many being new to this learning environment. The online delivery allowed many to organise their time to suit their needs and remain on track with the programme at a comfortable pace. One participant noted that the online delivery meant that the impact of the Covid-19 crisis was limited.

Many participants also mentioned the wide variety of the learning material as being very positive and cited the resources provided, such as videos and links to relevant TED talks as being very enjoyable. Another participant noted that the assignments were enjoyable and provided a deep understanding.

Benefits of the programme - The programme provided value to the learners with many benefits being noted. One participant noted an increase in productivity as a direct result of implementing the research project in the workplace. Many noted that they whilst they had already seen improvements they fully expected that their projects would continue to accrue improvements into the future.

Suggested improvements - Some of the participants felt that the learning material could be simplified, and that at times they felt it was 'too academic'. A number of participants felt that the course fully met expectations and did not suggest any improvements.

Germany

Following a content analysis of both the learner interviews (n=5) and the reflective group sessions held at the beginning of each module and also a final group discussion held in the last week of July with interested participants and those that experienced difficulties in solving some activities. The conclusions outlined by most of the learners now follows.

Research skills contributed to develop knowledge in a field connected with the own project. They learned about different forms of innovation and can use some new innovative ideas in own projects and companies.

Most of them considered the Module 2 about Data analysis helping them to make decisions on customer trends and behavior prediction, increasing business profitability and drive effective decision-making within their work in company. They understand better and could improve the objectives and activities for their business project. Some learners affirmed that using data analysis in their job (not only in their small project) they can determine what forms of advertising reach customers effectively and make an impact that will make them buy the products, what products are suitable for what clients, the areas that you are going to focus on and for which customers.

Data analyses also give them an idea on the future trends in consumer behavior that will enable innovations in company products. One important field was that data analyzed can be used to detect a malfunction in the business system and the technical systems that show any problem in the quality and quantity of production.

One of the final advantages of the Reinnovate learning program discussed was the possibility to reflect on their own project and on the task they had to fulfill in the company. They recognized that they don't usually reflect because they are too busy getting on to the next task, too busy with the next difficulties and not analyzing what is missing or have to be improved to complete successfully own work.

Some learners as well as SME managers expressed interest to participate in a new training program Reinnovate similar, particularly about topics discussed above. They underlined that mixed training methods (if possible) face to face and online, focus groups and tutors/mentors will be more suitable. A platform easy to use like in Reinnovate will be very useful. In addition, interactive more interactive learning methods and interdisciplinary problems to be solved will be helpful. The learners and managers underlined that very often they have difficulties to solve such interdisciplinary problems because in SMEs there are usually not specialized people.

In Germany like in other European countries, there are some qualification programs for SME employees but unfortunately, the participation was very low because employees from such companies are interested in being qualified for their work place and concrete tasks quickly.

After some press releases, presentation of the Reinnovate learning program at two conferences and personal discussions with SME managers, 50 employees from the companies expressed interest in Reinnovate training program and required from IAT more information. Due to Corona Crisis with closed companies and/or low work time only 21 German employees started the learning program and 20 of them finished it.

Due to Corona Crisis some of the participants were not very optimistic in the last months as at the beginning of the training program (also due to Corona and job instability) so the IAT tutors and German partners tried to help them explaining every week the importance of the Reinnovate training program not only for their present employment situation (which was in the last 3 months unsure) but also for starting a new job if it will be necessary.

Lithuania

Taking into account the responses of learners to interview, we must emphasize that the program has received very positive feedback. All learners agreed that programme and content improved their skills.

After completing the program, learners highlighted the benefits of searching for new idea approach, data analysis, teamwork skills. It was suggested that such a program could be recommended for start-ups and included in entrepreneurship training programs. Some of learners expressed idea that it would be useful to organize several live meetings during learning process.

Participants found ICT platform rich with learning support materials and learners found it very useful. No one mentioned any negative features of the program.

After learning process was successfully completed, we can draw some conclusions. Despite we all faced Covid 19 this year, we were lucky enough to manage first meetings, enrolment of participants and begin the learning process before the restriction of public life took place. Therefore, we had only couple of dropouts during the spring. 4 learners could not successfully complete Reinnovate program, however we have to keep in mind that situation with Covid 19 was kind of force majeure. Based on learner's participation and completion rate, their communication with tutor and feedback it can be firmly said that the program has been useful and successful.

ICT platform was rich with learning support materials, and video links might be as very good example. Learners found homework and tasks interesting and what is more important - useful. The fact that program's content was one size fit to everyone (different business sectors) was very important too.

Romania

Our conclusions were based on students' perceptions, questions asked and interest shown. The students appreciated first of all the innovative teaching method, based on answers to practical questions, on examples starting from the current activity of the students, at the workplace. The students asked questions about the specific activity of their own company, the department in which they carry out their activity. The practical examples, many in number, were specific to student companies. Practical topics were formulated by the students. Students learned:

- How to apply innovation theories in your own companies, sectors of activity
- How to turn an idea into an applied product
- How to take an idea from the research phase, through TRL, to innovation, testing, pilot system development, manufacturing instruction.

Students were interviewed 5 times and an analysis of group interviews was made at the beginning of each module as well as the final group discussion organized in the last week of July. The final discussion was with interested participants

or with the students who had some difficulties in solving some activities. The conclusions collected from the students will be presented below.

Research skills, contributed to the verification of one's own knowledge regarding the success of future activities.

Appreciated as useful were also considered by the students: Module 1 - Using research to identify future opportunities. This module allowed students to design and explore the feasibility of different business opportunities using research-based learning.

Module 3 - Management of the research project. This module allowed students to manage a small-scale research project in their organization to enable them to implement a new business opportunity. It was appreciated that part of entrepreneurship involves managing ideas to properly implement a concept.

A lower appreciation, due to the weight of the understanding, was enjoyed by Module 4 - Evaluation of success and future opportunities.

In the unitary concept of the project, this module aimed to allow students to think, to analyze on the impact of research in the workplace, on the need, well before application on the market, to come up with innovative ideas and products, and to determine opportunities for research and development, to create competitiveness, in the workplace.

It was appreciated the need to know the procedures provided for in Module 4, but it is considered that the level of knowledge required is high, above the level of participants, in the practice of companies requires time of analysis and should therefore be a Module included in the Curriculum University training at engineering.

One of the final advantages of the Reinnoate learning program discussed was the possibility of analyzing its own project and the tasks it must perform within the company. Participants acknowledged that they do not usually reflect reality because they do not have time for analysis, being busy with current tasks, with the difficulties encountered which is why they do not analyze what is missing or need to be improved to successfully complete their own work. They don't have time for analysis and feedback.

We saw the need for digital techniques, platforms that respond as accurately as possible to the needs, with clear answers and topics. Reinnoate was an example of this and was immediately suitable for the necessary adaptations to the new needs imposed by the crisis, in the midst of the training process. The Reinnoate platform has proven its usefulness, flexibility and concept based on innovation and digitization.

We learned to utilize Reinnoate platform. Now we understand it, we utilize it and are familiar for us. A similar platform, easy to use, as in Reinnoate will be very useful. In addition, interactive learning methods, based on examples, best practices and interdisciplinary problems will be more helpful.

The students received very well the YouTube channel, where they found several examples of good practice and case analyses on their own examples and their own problems encountered. Students and managers pointed out that very often they have difficulty solving such interdisciplinary problems, because there are usually no specialized people in SMEs and no time for analysis.

At the beginning, we started the courses in the hall, with a thorough introduction of the objectives of the course, practicality, in order to realize knowledge between the participants, the lecturers, the members and the coordinator of the course.

Spain

5 learners have been interviewed (taking into account those that completed at least 50% of the course, since we did not get 5 learners who completed successfully the full course). The interviews were made by phone call, given the situation of COVID-19 and the general advice against face to face meetings.

Most of the learners interviewed expressed that, although it was the first time they joined a Moodle platform, they found it easy to use, not complex and easy to find the content. The way the content and materials (modules, videos) were delivered is considered appropriate.

Communication & collaboration - Regarding the communication and collaboration among learners, the tutor suggested to use Google Meet to chat with the learners once a week instead of the Forum and Chat of the ICT platform. Additionally, for questions addressed to the tutor, they preferred to do it through mail instead of the ICT platform. When joining the sessions in Google Meet, around 4 learners participated plus the tutor, and the communication and interaction among them was good.

Most enjoyable aspects - Learners noticed the activities facilitated their learning, since the accomplishment of these activities in some way "obliged" them to review and pay attention to the content, think about it and internalize it. Although some learners were not able to complete the full course, they found the content interesting and very useful, especially for their job function. They consider the materials comprehensive and appreciate the supplementary materials such as videos.

Suggested improvements - Those learners who did not find the platform easy to be recommended that it be improved. The rest did not outline anything.

Obstacles - The main obstacles they faced during the programme were combining the hours dedicated to the course with working hours, and also conciliate it with home life and looking after children, especially during lockdown, when these home tasks became tougher.

Summary - The first time we promoted the course, we did not recruit as many learners as foreseen in the proposal, despite our efforts in disseminating it: digital media (website and social networks) and face to face events and dissemination of brochures. With these results, and once all the learners registered dropped out of the course, we decided to launch a second call for applicants, and we got great results then.