



## **ENTrepreneurship Enhancement and Reinforcement**

Progress Report

Public Part

## Project information

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## Executive Summary

This report is addressed to the project stakeholders and to the public in general with interest in Entrepreneurship training and in innovation development related issues.

The ENTER project aims at leveraging processes of development and individual promotion of new entrepreneurs through the use of Information and Communication Technologies based platforms and tools that will allow delivering innovative interactive multimedia contents but will also support collaboration and communication in a Virtual Learning Community spread in Europe. This aim will be reached by the definition and implementation of a specific entrepreneurial training/counselling programme offering an integrated guidance to entrepreneurs from the early stage of motivation and idea generation through the personalised support in implementing business projects and nurturing recently created companies in incubators, in a perspective that integrates simultaneously training centres and enterprises, through science and technology parks.

The target users will be directly involved in the project activities. A group integrating vocational trainees (ISCED 3-4) with technical perspectives, as well as employed and unemployed people with different backgrounds, will pilot the training/mentoring prototype edition to be implemented in each participating country. The goal is to form an experience and know-how mix that allows triggering synergies.

ENTER is a project for development of innovation and therefore its main focus is centred in the development of the e-learning platform, as well as course contents and activities. The use of innovative e-learning tools will provide a flexible training model that the area requires. The e-learning model is based on a two phase process: a blended learning course, combining workshops with a set of collaborative and participative activities, and a mentoring phase to support the launching of business projects. As a result of the training phase the trainees will produce a set of good business plans, from which a subset will then be selected to the mentoring phase.

The participating countries are Portugal, France, Romania and Greece, represented by institutions from the educational area, mainly training centres, and partners specialised in supporting the creation of new companies, such as science and technology parks. The nature of the partners allows ensuring the sustainability of the project results beyond the project lifetime. The training institutions partners will integrate the training stage in their own course programmes, and will systematically approach entrepreneurship to its trainees and trainers, and involve enterprise experts in the training and mentoring phases; science and technology parks and other partners will support and incubate the companies in process of creation.

During the first year of the project, the work was concentrated in the delivery of innovative interactive multimedia contents and support for collaboration and communication with the aim of creating the conditions for the establishment of an effective Virtual Learning Community. The pedagogical and technical specification documents produced already provide an overview of innovative training solutions. The e-learning platform and the e-learning course will soon be released. The second year of the project will be centred on the implementation of the prototype edition and consequent evaluation of the training/mentoring phases.

More information on the ENTER project can be found at <http://www.enter-project.eu>

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# 1. Project Objectives

The basic aim of the ENTER project is to leverage the processes of development and individual promotion of new entrepreneurs through the use of Information and Communication Technologies based platforms and tools that will allow to deliver innovative interactive multimedia contents but will also support collaboration and communication in a Virtual Learning Community spread in Europe. This aim will be reached by the definition and implementation of a common model of training and mentoring, in a perspective that integrates training centres and enterprises through Science and Technology parks and associations in a transnational and intercultural context.

This model departs from the sequential accomplishment of a set of workshops, subordinated to management and entrepreneurship related subjects. With these actions it will be possible to enhance the idea of entrepreneurship and to support a set of business ideas suggested by the trainees who will later develop individual initiatives. Each group will have a local organisation and, with the aim of maximising the interaction and proximity between all, an active and constructive participation of the trainees will be promoted through an adjustment of the resources to the objectives and public in question, as well as, promoting the trainees' autonomy and persistence in the resolution of problems. For example, the interaction will be promoted through processes of enterprise competitive virtual simulation and the analysis of case studies. In a similar way, and even if the training in each group is lead by local trainers of entrepreneurial origin, it will also have as resources European specialists from the participating countries, whose interventions will be electronically distributed, simultaneously, for all the groups. In a later phase, together with the launching of the individual enterprise projects, this pool of specialists, through electronic collaboration, will make the individual accompaniment of each entrepreneur.

Each group piloting the training/mentoring prototype edition in each participating country integrates vocational trainees (ISCED 3-4) with technical perspectives, as well as employed and unemployed people with different backgrounds. The goal is to form an experience and know-how mix that allows triggering synergies. It is expected that this target audience is prepared to design, set-up and organise SMEs oriented to technical services (like software installation, computer repairing, web design, network and security administration, among others).

ENTER is a project for development of innovation and therefore its main focus will be the development of the e-learning platform, as well as course contents and activities. The aim is to effectively implement a realistic, competitive and sustainable Virtual Learning Community, which will promote a specific entrepreneurial training/mentoring programme offering an integrated guidance to entrepreneurs from the early stage of motivation and idea generation through a personalised support in implementing business projects and nurturing recently created companies in incubators. This learning environment includes:

- An e-learning platform that is able to support interoperability issues through e-learning standards
- A content creation tool capable of integrating and synchronising multimedia elements

- A digital repository to store the Learning Objects
- A synchronous communication system

In this way it will be possible to reach the following global objectives:

- To design and evaluate a sustainable model, supported by e-learning, to motivate and train new entrepreneurs
- To create the conditions to increase the success rate of start-up companies, when compared to the present reality
- To allow entrepreneurs to have an European approach from the moment of development of their business ideas
- To integrate efficiently training institutions with the enterprise environment
- To design and apply a valorisation plan that generates an European dimension for the developed model

In a medium term, considering the best dissemination results, valorisation activities can provide a further geographic coverage and expand the project results to entrepreneurs from other areas. It is expected that, at this stage, yearly editions of the model could directly reach more than 100 futures entrepreneurs. It is thus expected that in the long term, by growing the number of involved organisations in different countries, it will be possible to reach over 250 future entrepreneurs per year, and support the creation of about 50 new companies each year (across Europe). But at the moment the major goal is to demonstrate that the proposed innovative model can in fact contribute to entrepreneurial spirit and motivation.

## 2. Project Approach

The ENTER project proposes an innovative training model for the adoption of an entrepreneurship culture and the encouragement of the motivation and capabilities to be an entrepreneur in everyday life. The use of innovative e-learning tools will provide the flexible training model that the area requires. Besides the e-learning platform and tools, the core value of the project is related to the whole process of Recruitment / Training / Mentoring / Networking that ENTER offers. The fact that the project develops in the context of a European multi-spots network can support the potential entrepreneur to envisage a business project with a European market perspective.

The e-learning model is based on a two phase process: On a first stage the pedagogical strategy consists of a blended learning approach, combining actual activities in workshops, with a set of collaborative and participative activities, supported by an electronic platform that will put the groups in each country in contact.

After attending face-to-face workshops, trainees will be asked to access online contents, organised in online session format, where they will be able to deepen their understanding on the subject at hand, whereas applying what they have learnt in specially conceived online activities. They also undergo intermediate online assessments that measure knowledge uptake progression and compare their current state of knowledge with the baseline pre-assessment.

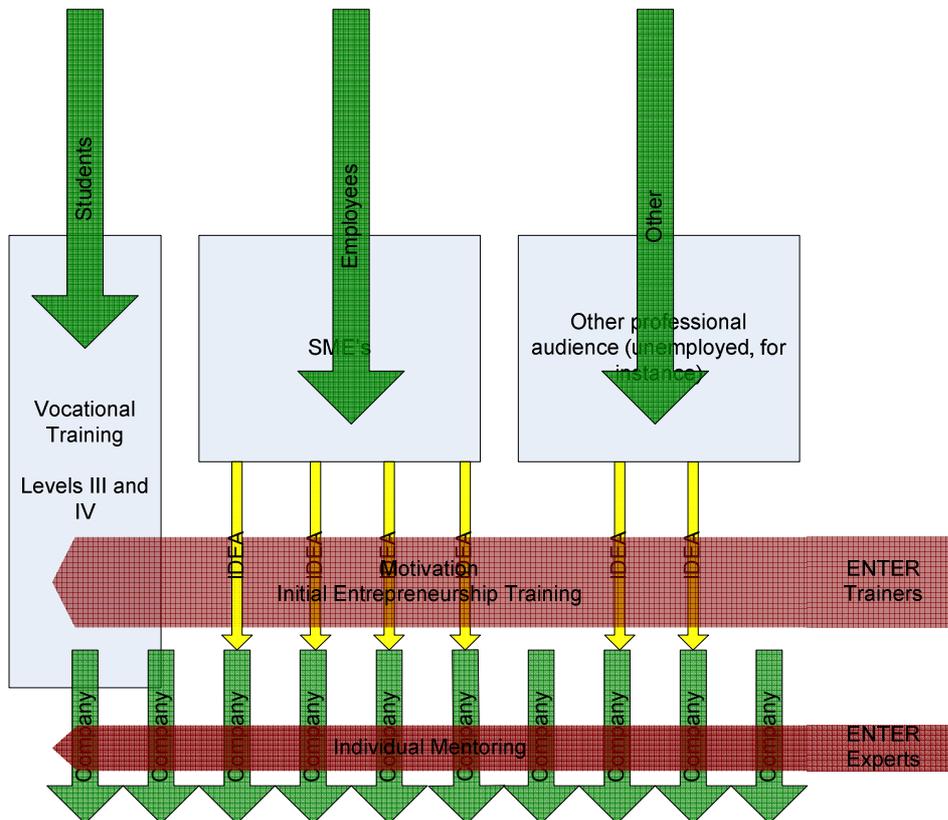
The collaborative and participative activities include discussion, case study, use of virtual simulators of the enterprise reality, including competition between groups. Contents and activities have a major common structure, developed in English and later translated into each partner's language. This common structure is complemented by specific contents for each country (legislation, for instance), developed solely in the partner languages. In each country trainers will be asked to explore and adapt the contents produced and already available in the e-learning platform. In this phase, there will also be lectures by specialists, distributed simultaneously to all the groups through video-conference. Each of these activities will be based on Learning Objects to allow further reuse and share. As a main result of this phase, each trainee will develop his/her own business plan. These plans will be analysed by the group of experts and a subset will be chosen to be specifically supported by the project. This support will be translated into an incubator hosting for the companies in process of creation provided in special conditions by the enterprise related project partners.

In a second phase, with the launching of individual initiatives - companies, trainees enter in a process of individual mentoring. A pool of specialists will be formed with participants from the intervening partner countries, each with well defined expertise. The experts will provide mentoring to the trainees in all 4 countries through an electronic channel (including desktop video-conferencing), contributing this way to the project's European Added Value.

Through the support of the electronic platform, when a trainee-entrepreneur has doubts he/she will be directed to the support of the adequate specialist. This communication portal allows new entrepreneurs to present their business project and company setup process. Social tools like blogs are a very interesting possibility to put

these entrepreneurs in contact with experts. The mentoring phase will last throughout the main company launching stages, depending on the level of development of the business project presented by each trainee. During this phase, the companies in process of creation will be incubated in Science and Technology Parks (partners of the project) or in other incubation organisations.

The following figure is a representation of the project life cycle:



The inherent effort to promote innovation is related to the reorganisation of a community that must prepare its members to assume a crucial and active role in the knowledge society. They must be proactive, anticipate challenges and be able to produce solutions. In short, these training community and SMEs members must be in control of their environment and create the conditions for its development. However, they will only obtain it if they are trained in an environment of creativity, autonomy, motivation, capacity to anticipate and to evaluate risks and courage to face the challenges.

The innovation in this project is based on the following points:

A new e-learning model integrating a motivational and training phase based on the immersion in an interactive, virtual, multimedia environment requiring collaborative efforts from the transnational groups of trainees and a mentoring phase, through a pool of experts spread around Europe. This model will also try to take advantage of the present effort in terms of broadband communication systems in the participating countries;

- The in-project support for the creation and/or maintenance of a set of companies resulting from the training phase, through its incubation in the S&T parks, partners of the project
- The guarantee that future entrepreneurs will be familiar with the enterprise environment
- Providing the entrepreneurs with a transnational vision from the first moment on, not limiting them to its local environment but offering a widened context for their business plans
- The integration of training centres and SMEs in the same network to develop and exchange expertise
- The integration from Training Centres and SMEs staff within the target audience that will gather future entrepreneurs

From the trainees participating in the prototype edition it is expected that they will be able to lead the creation and development of a market niche that supports future editions of the same courses. Moreover, the ENTER project will actively correlate with other Lifelong Learning programme Innovation and Entrepreneurship related projects at national and European level. It is expected that the ENTER model will guarantee an increase in the rate of entrepreneurs and an increase of the success rate the bred companies. In a first phase, in the scope of the project, a starting group of 40 entrepreneurs was expected to pilot the model. The first results regarding the recruitment of trainees in each participating country show that this number will be higher. In a longer term, the project target groups can be geographically expanded (to other European countries) and to other fields of knowledge. It is expected that it will be possible, in a near future, to widen this number up to 100 trained entrepreneurs per year. This multiplication assures the sustainability of the project and it is possible because all the products will be available in a distributed digital platform that guarantees its future usability.

The success of this training will be measured by the quality of the proposed business plans and, later on, by the trainees' achievements as entrepreneurs. Thus, assessment is taken not as a way to discover the trainees' potential and limitations, but rather as a self-regulation mechanism of the training process and of the trainee's personal/professional development. So its main objective is to introduce the need to continue vocational assessment on the trainees and to encourage them to use it independently in their training and self-training processes. The emphasis on evaluation has more to do with the acquisition of skills for assessing professional performance to be used in a lifelong perspective, than with the selection of trainees, and focuses more on their resources and potential, than on obstacles and limitations.

### 3. Project Outcomes & Results

During the first year of the project, the focus was centred on the delivery of innovative interactive multimedia contents and support for collaboration and communication aiming the creation of the conditions for the establishment of an effective Virtual Learning Community. This required a strong effort dedicated to the specification, design and development of all formative products and contents tools. The most difficult and time consuming task was to fully develop the e-learning methodology and look for existing resources that could fit that methodology in an integrated form. Only then was it possible to decide which resources and contents would be developed.

The Pedagogical Specification, which includes requirements analysis, methodology definition, learning strategies, support technologies, learning moments, among others, is one of the most important results delivered. Another achieved result is the definition of the technological platform, with its functionalities and restrictions. The installation of tools is almost complete, and it includes the e-learning platform, digital repository, content creation and synchronous communications system. The Alpha and Beta testing were also performed.

Therefore the project has already produced good guidelines for content and course authoring - the pedagogical and technical specification documents – that provide an overview of innovative training solutions. The pedagogical specification document makes a clear definition of innovative training pedagogies and e-learning. The technical specification for the e-learning platform establishes comparisons between different e-learning platforms, content authoring tools, learning objects repositories, online conferencing tools and business simulation systems, and it also establishes the technical requirements for the installation of the platform.

The development of materials and pedagogical strategies for the training/mentoring model focused on the following subjects: Company, Marketing, Financing, Communication, Internationalisation, Business Plan, Project Management, Innovation and Industrial Property. The modules contents have been produced and/or adapted by project partners from different countries and are actually being converted into more multimedia and interactive contents.

The e-learning course is almost complete and will be soon released in 5 languages: English, Portuguese, French, Romanian and Greek. The target groups identified as project trainees will participate in this prototype edition. The target audience is therefore involved in the project. More than 100 candidates registered through the project website to enrol in the training course. A total of 70 trainees were selected to participate in the ENTER pilot course between January and July 2009 to be implemented in Portugal, France, Romania and Greece.

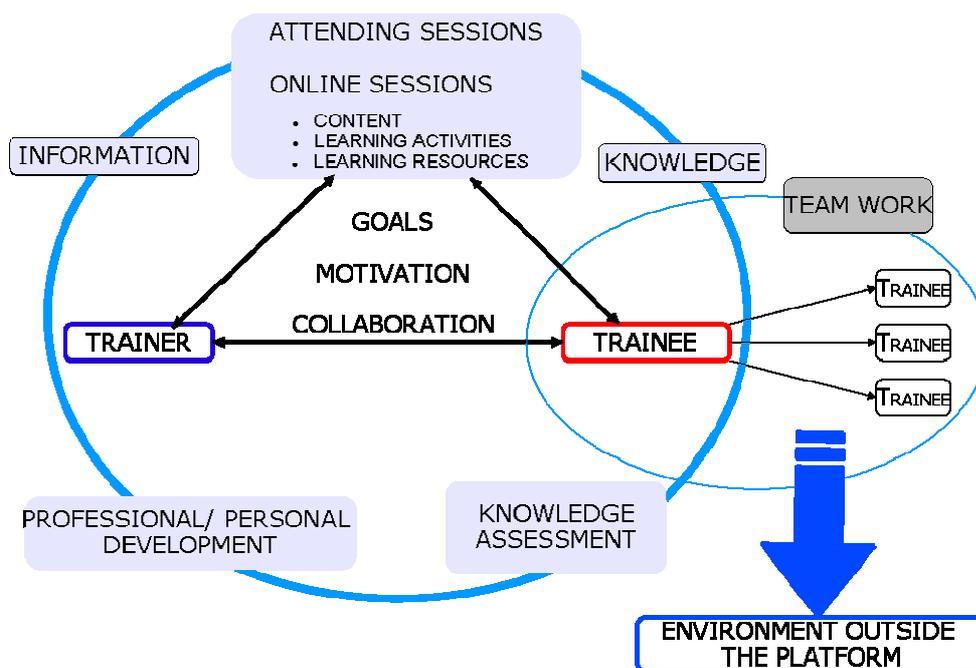
In order to spread information about the project and, simultaneously, to get to the target public and to identify trainees to participate in the prototype edition, it was necessary to start the dissemination activities before planned. The project website has been created and developed, the graphical image of the project has been designed and publicity materials (flyers and posters) have been produced and distributed. The project has also been presented in local fairs and exhibitions, and also in European conferences and through the publication of articles and the dissemination through institutional websites.

In short, the implemented e-learning technological model includes:

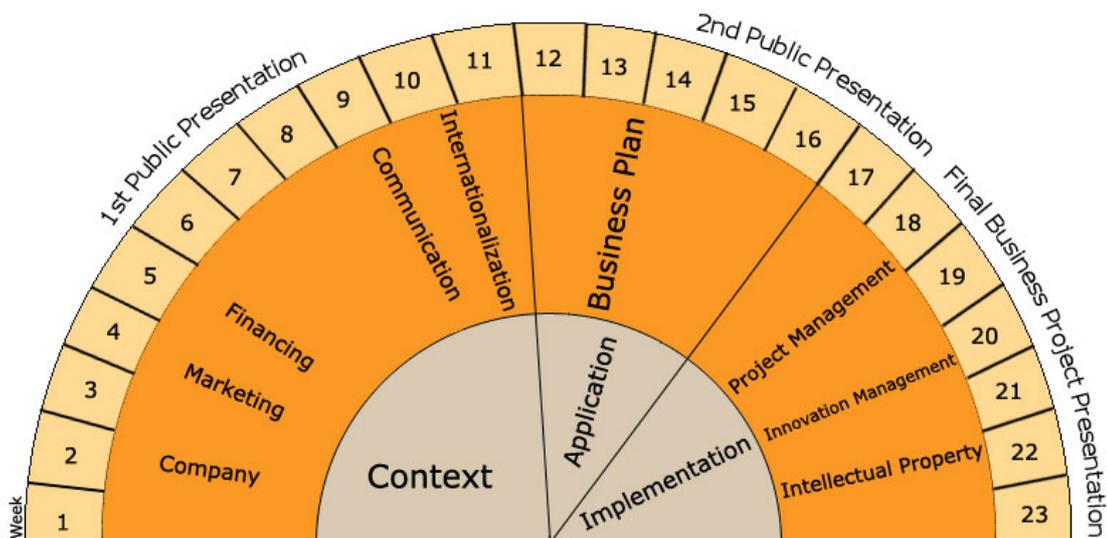
- An e-learning platform which is able to support interoperability issues through e-learning standards (SCORM). An open source tool was chosen. The *Moodle* platform has been customised and integrated.
- A content creation tool capable of integrating and synchronising multimedia elements. *Adobe Presenter* was chosen and it is being used for multimedia contents conversion.
- A digital repository to store the Learning Objects. An open source tool was chosen. *D-Space* will be soon integrated in the platform. This digital repository will allow displaying and sharing resources outside the project.
- A synchronous communication system. The chosen system is *Elluminate*, which will be soon integrated in the platform.

Another benefit of engaging in this methodology is the resulting increase of digital literacy in the trainees (and probably trainer), providing new abilities that will benefit them throughout their academic and professional careers.

The methodology defined in the Pedagogical Specification is based on a blended-learning approach combining face-to-face classroom instruction with live online learning and self-paced learning, resulting in reduced classroom contact hours (reduced seat time). Therefore, this instructional model merges the effectiveness and socialisation opportunities of the classroom with the technological enhanced active learning possibilities of the online environment, including collaborative learning among learners, knowledge sharing and consistent delivery of information, as each trainee is given exactly the same contents as their colleagues. Generally, this pedagogical model can be schematised as follows:



The course structure and schedule is organised as follows:



The course will require about 225 hours of trainees' work, divided in modules of 25 hours each. Each module will last 2 weeks approximately. Trainees are also given the opportunity to present their achievements formally in sessions specially conceived for presentation and discussion of their business projects with the presence of trainers and national entrepreneurs expressly invited for this purpose.

This jury will integrate members of the pool of experts that, through these presentations, will be able to select the best business plans which will pass to the mentoring phase. The pool of European specialists and mentors will include members from all the involved countries and will be soon identified. Together with the launching of the business individual projects, this pool will make the individual accompaniment of each entrepreneur, through electronic collaboration supported by the electronic platform and the synchronous communications system. On the other side, the new entrepreneurs will be asked to present, through the electronic platform, their business projects and company setup process, allowing the identification of the best expert to collaborate with. During the mentoring phase, the companies in process of creation will be incubated in Science and Technology Parks (partners of the project) or in other incubation organisations.

More information can be found in the project website <http://www.enter-project.eu>. Through the website it is possible to access the e-learning platform and enrol in a demonstration session. The project website is regularly updated with project progress information and news. For more information please contact: Ms. Cláudia Azevedo [cazevedo-enter@tecmaia.com](mailto:cazevedo-enter@tecmaia.com)

## 4. Partnerships

The consortium integrates country partners where the issue of entrepreneurship has faced development problems. The participating countries are Portugal, France, Romania and Greece, represented by institutions from the educational area, mainly training centres, and specialised partners in supporting the creation of new companies, such as Science and Technology Parks, Enterprise Associations and Chambers of Commerce, as well as local development associations and ITC research centres that support SMEs. This partnership allows a critical analysis of the influence of cultural aspects and social contrasts between these countries in the field of entrepreneurship. The nature of the partners allows ensuring the sustainability of the project results beyond the project lifetime. The Training institutions partners will integrate the training stage in their own course programmes, and will systematically approach entrepreneurship to its trainees and trainers, and involve enterprise experts in the training and mentoring phases. The Science and Technology Parks and the Enterprise associations will support and incubate the companies in process of creation. These partners will provide a bigger European involvement, guarantee a widened vision of the enterprise reality, supply a larger set of available specialists and guarantee a starting point for the widening and post project sustainability of the results.

From the project first results and interaction within the partnership, there is already evidence of the high level of integration of the project in most of the partners, as well as an effective learning organisation path across the partnership. The definition of a nucleus of partners with previous knowledge between themselves, in each country, guarantees the stability of the processes and communication and the achievement of results. The partners form a coherent group and there is evidence of a good level of collaboration.

The issue of developing an entrepreneurial spirit is common in the European countries. However, to achieve an effective impact at the European level it is necessary to have a homogeneous development in all countries. Therefore, it is important to correlate national experiences and transpose best practices to other contexts, identifying what can be replicable or not.

The target users have been involved in the project, and will participate directly in the implementation of the prototype edition of the training/mentoring phases. More than 100 candidates have registered through the project website to enrol in the training course to be implemented in Portugal, France, Romania and Greece. During the implementation of the training/mentoring phases, their feedback will be collected by the partnership in order to evaluate the innovative model proposed by the ENTER project.

Partners have also started establishing contacts, within their own networking, for possible partnerships outside the consortium with the aim of exploring opportunities for the sustainability of the ENTER project results. Contacts are mainly established with national enterprise associations, training institutions, public authorities, as well as with other entrepreneurship related programmes.

This project will contribute to a European Added Value by establishing a pool of experts, from different countries, with different competencies and expertise which will provide mentoring to the trainees through an electronic channel (including desktop

video-conferencing). Later, after the project lifetime, this pool can be extended to include a larger database of experts capable of answering questions and doubts from a growing number of trainees. The trainees will be encouraged to form a transnational peer network that will be able to provide peer support for future trainees and entrepreneurs.

## 5. Plans for the Future

The second year of the project will be centred on the implementation of the prototype edition (built during the first year of the project) and consequent evaluation of the training/mentoring phases. The target groups already identified as trainees will participate in this prototype edition. The e-learning platform and the e-course in 5 languages (English, Portuguese, French, Romanian and Greek) are practically finalised and will be released during the first months of 2009. The e-learning platform will be integrated with the digital repository and the synchronous communications system. The contents of the modules have been finalised in English and are now in process of conversion to multimedia contents and of translation into the language of each participating country. Local trainers are involved in the process of exploring and adapting the contents and the activities produced by the partnership to local target public and conditions.

The training phase will last from January to July 2009 and will be implemented in each participating country, therefore having a local organisation with the participation of local trainers. During this phase, and in order to enhance the European approach of the project, it will be promoted the intervention of specialists that with the support of the e-learning platform will give lectures distributed simultaneously to all the groups through video-conference. As a result of the training phase a set of good business plans will be produced by the trainees participating in this prototype edition. The best business plans will then be selected by a group of experts and these will pass to the mentoring phase. The pool of European specialists and mentors will include members from all the involved countries and will be soon identified. Together with the launching of the business individual projects, this pool will make the individual accompaniment of each entrepreneur, through electronic collaboration supported by the electronic platform and the synchronous communications system. On the other side, the new entrepreneurs will be asked to present, through the electronic platform, their business projects and company setup process, allowing the identification of the best expert to collaborate with. During the mentoring phase, the companies in process of creation will be incubated in Science and Technology Parks (partners of the project) or in other incubation organisations.

It is important that the implementation of training reflects the innovation specified in the pedagogical and technical specification documents already developed by the project. It is also intended that the training/mentoring phases reflect a European approach. This means that the activities will not represent a multiple-national activity, but will take place crossing all the partner countries. Both training and mentoring phases will be the focus of an evaluation report.

Dissemination will continue and will adopt a new orientation towards disseminating the project results, through the project website development and maintenance, the production of further publicity materials and the periodical newsletter to be delivered soon. The participation of partners in international conferences and seminars is also very important at this level, as well as the publication of articles, and the organisation of the final seminar in Maia, Portugal. This event intends to be a major regional and national event, possibly with European evidence. A Business Model for exploitation of results is under preparation and will be released at the end of the project.

## 6. Contribution to EU policies

This project strongly contributes to the implementation of the Lisbon Strategy – Education & Training Progress Indicators and Key Competencies – knowledge and Innovation, employment: Digital competence; Learning to learn; Interpersonal, intercultural and social competences and civic competence; Entrepreneurship. The proposal will focus on stakeholders able to develop business projects and create their own companies. When successful, these companies will work as exemplary cases for other trainees to enrol the courses. The main focus of the project is to promote and reinforce entrepreneurship competencies at a European level. The project will directly address this objective by focussing on ICT enhanced training. This approach will also allow the development of the trainees' personal competencies, for instance the reinforcement of digital literacy (by learning how to effectively use internet platforms and tools). At the same time, trainees will acquire competencies that will allow them to develop autonomous ways of exploring these platforms and look for new learning opportunities so that they fulfil the expectation of Lifelong Learning. They will also develop capacities to autonomously promote the entrepreneurial activities.

In terms of Equal Opportunities, the problem of the reduced adhesion of Women to the ICT area and career is also well known. It is expected that the project can reduce this gap by promoting other views of the ICT area near Women, encouraging them to use ICT, in order to increase the capacity of the workforce and to tap into women's creative potential.

Regarding European Enterprise policies, this project focus is on the development of new enterprises and the reinforcement of the existing ones.

The project is able to answer the objectives established in the Lifelong Learning Programme:

- to contribute to the development of quality lifelong learning
- to reinforce the contribution of lifelong learning to social cohesion, active citizenship, intercultural dialogue, gender equality and personal fulfillment
- to help promote creativity, competitiveness, employability and the growth of an entrepreneurial spirit
- to contribute to increased participation in lifelong learning by people of all ages, including those with special needs and disadvantaged groups, regardless of their socio-economic background
- to support the development of innovative ICT-based content, services, pedagogies and practice for lifelong learning

