

Pedagogic Strategy



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1. Introduction

Women Technology Entrepreneurs (WTE) aims to harness the technology and entrepreneurial potential of women across eight European countries by developing a flexible, bespoke and innovative training programme designed specifically to meet the needs of rurally based nascent and established female entrepreneurs.

Women Technology Entrepreneurs is an online programme that brings together core elements of entrepreneurship training interwoven with key aspects of technology curricula, focused on the needs of our core target group.

WTE offers a targeted and informative learning experience for female entrepreneurs assisting them to explore, understand and exploit technology for the benefit of their business whilst building key skills in terms of marketing, business management, communication and business networking.

The project consortium promoting WTE recognise that although the technology and entrepreneurial potential of women are latent sources of economic growth and job creation, there is a lack of targeted and specific curricula designed with women in mind across EU countries. Therefore, the main activity of WTE focused on developing a curriculum to address the low levels of women across the European Union engaged in entrepreneurial and technological activity.

In addition, the WTE consortium has developed an online Digital Opportunity Road-map for Women to support women's entrepreneurial activity and continuing engagement with lifelong learning, highlighting the entrepreneurial and technological possibilities of the modern economy for WTE participants.

1.1. Context of the WTE Pedagogic Strategy

This Pedagogic Strategy was developed based on the results of research conducted in 8 European countries, namely Ireland, Austria, Latvia, Spain, Greece, Malta, Finland and Lithuania, in which local stakeholders such as curriculum development experts, business support experts, experienced women entrepreneurs and service providers in technology and entrepreneurship courseware expressed their opinions and views on the pedagogic requirements of the WTE training programme.

The research ascertained the most appropriate methodology, tools, motivation and learners supports required to deliver a training pilot experience adjusted to the characteristics and training needs of women entrepreneurs.

1.2 Engaging Tutors and Trainees

In order to guarantee the appropriate engagement both for tutors and trainees, the results of our research show that carrying out a clear and concise advertising campaign will increase the interest in the WTE training experience. In particular, the project consortium will use:

- ◆ Effective dissemination channels using leaflets, posters, standard presentations
- ◆ Contacts to several national entities related to the WTE fields, etc.
- ◆ Face to face discussions, in order to motivate possible participants
- ◆ Engagement in preparatory meetings
- ◆ Targeted calls and interviews

2. Aims of WTE Pedagogic Strategy

Developments in technology and rapid changes in the global business landscape place increasing pressure on VET providers to meet new demands in a wide variety of educational areas. Teaching and learning opportunities continue to expand with Web 2.0 technology and the expectations of learners for educational services tailored to meet their exact needs or preferences are also growing. Appropriate pedagogic strategies that recognise the demands of learners and the potential of VET to respond are an essential first step. New learning environments present opportunities and challenges not least of these being the need for new student support mechanisms to be in-built into pedagogic practices.

The WTE Pedagogic Strategy clearly defines:

- ◆ The tutor and learner roles and responsibilities
- ◆ The supports required by our learners
- ◆ Guidelines for engagement and management of these new education processes

3. Roles and Responsibilities of Tutors and Learners

Defining the key roles and responsibilities of both tutors and learners has enabled project partners develop this curriculum with reference to the learning and teaching styles of the target groups, namely potential female entrepreneurs and VET professionals. This was a recognised element of curriculum development and ensured maximum relevance of the lifelong learning process for both tutors and learners.

3.1 The main required skills of tutors

- ◆ Experience in adult education: Tutors are required to have experience in training or teaching within the adult learning sector and be capable of facilitating adult learners using teaching methods that increase the active participation of adult learners, according to their specific learning styles.
- ◆ Ability to animate Adult Learners: The trainer's role is not only to provide technical knowledge, but to create an environment helpful to discussion and experience sharing. Animating adult learners in this manner can contribute to an atmosphere in which women feel respected and encouraged to share their views and interact with others.
- ◆ Communication: Tutors are required to have the capacity to interact with the adult learners through; one to one communication, online communication and group facilitation. Tutors should encourage the sharing and development of ideas among women, adopting attitudes and behaviours that value differential experiences and perspectives.
- ◆ Experience in either technology or entrepreneurship training or both: Tutors are required to have practical knowledge of the courseware being delivered and an ability to relate each module to the overall course objectives and content.
- ◆ Working in an Inclusive way: Learning difficulties, learning styles, language considerations and attention spans are important aspects for all groups. The tutor must determine if learners will understand the language used. There has been a historical bias in favour of certain groups in society. Tutors should be aware of these imbalances. It is important however, not to over-compensate for the power imbalances that operate in society as this can be perceived as reverse discrimination. Social conditioning has led many

of us to expect different behaviour of women and men. The tutor should check their own attitude and watch what is happening in the group in terms of the norms and attitudes about gender issues. This awareness will ensure the WTE training is delivered from a gender sensitive perspective.

- ◆ Gender Sensitivity: The concept of gender sensitivity has been developed as a way to reduce barriers to personal and economic development created by sexism. Gender sensitivity helps to generate respect for the individual regardless of sex.

Throughout the WTE course attention and discussion should be facilitated in the following ways:

1. Allow participants the opportunity to get to know each other and to break down initial interpersonal communication barriers
2. Encourage participants to examine their personal beliefs regarding the division of labour between men and women and equality of access to work
3. Help participants clarify their personal beliefs about the roles of women and men
4. Provide participants with examples in today's society as appropriate
5. Analyse reading materials using knowledge and understanding of gender issues
6. Assist participants to become more aware of existing stereotypes and to help them analyse such stereotypes
7. Make participants more aware of women's changing roles in keeping with other changes in the world

The above methods of gender sensitivity, once adopted, will greatly assist the relevance of the material taught and the personalisation of individual learning experiences. A comprehensive gender sensitivity training manual for tutors is available online from UNESCO at <http://unesdoc.unesco.org/images/0013/001376/137604eo.pdf>

3.2 The main required skills of learners

As the main purpose of the WTE training programme is to encourage rural women to become female entrepreneurs and start up their own business activities, training will be offered at an ab initio level with strong progression routes demonstrated for WTE trainees.

Evidence within and across the adult learning sector has shown that the drop-out rates can be minimized when participants have a good level of education, particularly in the entrepreneurial and technological fields.

The WTE consortium “specifically target women in rural communities where skills needed for traditional labour-intensive manufacturing or agricultural employment have given way to new requirements for polyvalent, cognitive skills and where e-working possibilities provide excellent potential for self-employment and the development of local economies”. This target group does not limit in any way the participation of women based on their current educational levels. Therefore a minimum educational level will not be adopted for use of the WTE courseware. To ensure that WTE does not have a high dropout level, the consortium aims to maximise the relevance of material while providing trainees with clear and concise information on learner outcomes.

Access to the internet and basic computer skills is required of participants in the WTE Training Programme as access to the internet and the ability to use WTE virtual elements is essential to successful course completion.

To conclude, the results of the WTE research process, conducted across eight European countries has shown that establishing requirements for participating to the training course is not useful. The only prerequisite for participants is basic knowledge of computers and access to the internet.

4. Methodologies and other pedagogical elements

The analysis carried out in by the WTE consortium highlighted the necessity to consider the following key points:

4.1 A training course adapted to the target group's needs

It was important to take into account women's needs, priorities and expectations in the planning, development, implementation and evaluation of training activities. This was facilitated through the locally constituted Research Control Groups. This ensured the needs of the target group were prioritised through the curriculum design, development and delivery process.

4.2 A training course flexible for trainees

Despite substantial attitudinal changes towards the role of women outside the home, and the upward trend in the numbers of women active and participating in the labour market, research confirms that women (with children) still constitute the primary homemakers and carers within society. This is particularly relevant in terms of their access to education and training, where family commitments continue to impact on their ability to participate in training and education opportunities. The delivery of the WTE course will be through a flexible accessible online platform ensuring it will be available at times that suit women with both home and work commitments. WTE provides a training course with flexible training content, duration and accessibility to cater for trainees' family, professional and time commitments.

4.3 An easily accessible and user-friendly learning environment

The e-learning platform created under WTE will support the acquisition of knowledge and skills through an easy to use website and in a number of formats to increase accessibility to participants with different learning styles. The e-learning platform will provide participants with a clear and concise course structure with clearly defined progression routes. Each module follows a predefined structure with a logical visual and theoretical flow throughout. Additional e-learning tools will include:

- ◆ Interactive course materials, such as online tests, online exercise, case studies, quizzes, bibliography, glossaries and other useful links
- ◆ Communication tools, such as public discussion forums and private chat
- ◆ RSS feeds
- ◆ Latest news
- ◆ Video testimonials from women entrepreneurs

4.4 Relevant and Practical training materials

As a project consortium, it was important that all aspects of the training we develop were both relevant and practically applicable to female entrepreneurs. Trainees will have different learning preferences and it is equally important to ensure that learners have access to the information in the format they learn best (referencing VARK Learning Preferences: Visual, Audio, Read, and Kinaesthetic). Additional references and useful links related to the entrepreneurial and technological fields can be used to encourage women to further complement the learning outcomes of WTE.

4.5 Suitable language

The fields of entrepreneurship and technology are renowned for their use of arduous language. To address this, the WTE course encourages the use of simple, jargon-free terminology where possible. Where technical language is required, a glossary of terms is provided. Content will be delivered in a clear and concise manner with additional supports available to assist learners if and when necessary.

4.6 Continued communication with learners

Tutors are required to be accessible to the trainees throughout the WTE course. This engagement should be used to monitor and motivate trainees as well as assist trainees experiencing difficulties with the course. Depending on the resources and preferences of both learners and tutors, a blended learning approach will be adopted by most implementing partner countries.

4.7 Tutor Induction Programme

WTE has developed a bespoke Tutor Induction Programme for VET tutors and trainers outlining the required knowledge and competences to facilitate the delivery of WTE. On completion on the Tutor Induction Programme, tutors and trainers will be able to:

- ◆ Understand the WTE project idea and its objectives
- ◆ Identify the core components of the WTE training course
- ◆ Comprehend how the WTE training course can be structured and presented
- ◆ Appreciate the skills required by tutors/trainers to deliver the WTE course components
- ◆ Understand what outcomes participants can achieve through the WTE course
- ◆ Evaluate the WTE training course

4.8 Programme Duration

Concerning the appropriate time duration of the WTE training course, the results of our research varies according to the target group's needs and the national or local training requirements. Having taken all of this into account, and based on the proposed hybrid structure of the curriculum, it is estimated that the most appropriate timing for a training course is between 20 – 60 hours depending on the number of modules selected and how much time is spent on each, combining online and independent learning.

5. Conclusion

In the WTE countries of Ireland, Austria, Latvia, Spain, Greece, Malta, Finland and Lithuania, our research has shown that there is no tailored courseware incorporating entrepreneurship and technology, specifically targeting women. To address this educational deficit and to achieve the WTE aims, local analysis was carried out in the WTE countries studying the existing technology and entrepreneurship educational landscape. This research identified the educational gaps and requirements of the immediate target group. Special attention was paid to the reasons for low participation levels for women in training courses related to entrepreneurial and technological fields. These largely related to the traditional stereotypes in society, the social status system, lack of spare time and self confidence issues.

WTE will positively address the barriers to women's participation in the fields of both technology and entrepreneurship activity by developing targeted and specific curricula that places the needs and potential of women at the centre of the education design, development and delivery process. The potential for women technology entrepreneurs is central to this project as is the development of appropriate learning tools, e-learning platform and implementation of the pedagogic strategy. Combined these elements will deliver real value to female entrepreneurs.



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