



Project “Teaming Up” sustainability plan



Interreg
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Introduction.

The programme Teaming UP is an opportunity to boost the confidence and business skills of the young generation interested in business and possessing entrepreneurial and business skills. It fosters a global approach to thinking and supports pupils in developing business teams and ideas within international student companies.

Cross-border cooperation is of crucial essence to the success of the programme. "Teaming UP" activities, outputs and results are based on creating, developing and implementing international business teams and business projects. The teams bring together young people from different countries, each offering their own unique, personal and professional contributions to the business team. Cross-border cooperation is the essence of the programme.

The programme Teaming UP had to be adapted to work online due to Covid. Nevertheless, the programme has recognizable results:

- 12 international student business teams formed;
- 60+ students from Latvia, Estonia and Finland developed their business ideas;
- 10 internationally recognized mentors offered their support;
- 11 product prototypes were created and presented to investors;
- 14 events were organized;
- 8 online workshops were held;
- 3 mentor speed dates were organized;
- 4 promotional videos were filmed.

Several aspects, elements, and resources of the programme, described later in this document, are essential for the programme's implementation and durability. The aspects, elements and resources, which must be taken into account by anyone willing to implement them in their schools, are:

- Students and their motivation;
- Teachers;
- Mentors, entrepreneurs, investors and other experts;
- Cross-border cooperation;
- Structured but flexible programme;
- Financial resources;
- Durability, transferability, and accessibility of the programme results.

1. Students and their motivation.

The student, of course, is at the centre of the Teaming UP programme. Those involved in the programme must be constantly vigilant to engage and retain students in the programme, especially when face-to-face events and meetings are not possible.

The implementers of the program's pilot project have defined the recommended profile of the participants of international student companies:

- Interested in entrepreneurship, previous business or student company experience is a bonus;
- Preferably at least 16 or 17 years old, some members may also be younger or older;
- English skills and other foreign languages are a bonus;
- Good communication skills;
- Ambitious and prompts new (business) ideas;
- Team-player;
- Action-oriented;
- Self-disciplined;
- Interested and motivated for personal development.

As the world started to close for travel and events in 2020, the Teaming Up managing team had to develop a plan to keep involved students engaged, motivated and willing to continue their journey in developing entrepreneurial skills in an international environment.

Students took part in well thought out interactive online workshops. These sessions were designed to promote team building, problem-solving and personal growth by challenging students to step out of their comfort zones. The students learned essential skills, such as working alone and as part of a larger team for group work, while gaining valuable knowledge of business strategies. Alongside workshops, students also held independent team meetings to further discuss and develop their business ideas, with teachers often joining them to offer mentorship.

Programme's key to success in making the online format exciting and attractive was the following:

- Have a desire to always look for the best possibilities for the youngsters;
- Offer interactive and practical workshops with easily applicable content;
- Support students' motivation in more ways than one.

All teams took part in the Grand Prix programme to further encourage student participation. The Grand Prix programme consisted of a series of team challenges where they were awarded points upon completion. The team points significantly impacted the final results announced at the last event, Pitching to investors. The best teams were awarded educational trips to Stockholm and Tallinn and career guidance and coaching sessions.

When thinking of motivating students and others involved in the international student company programme, one must keep these three elements in mind:

- The understanding of the motivation of the individuals involved as well as understanding motivation as a concept or a unique resource;

- Utilising inner motivation - our purpose or reason to do something;
- Get inspired by the outside world. Speakers, writers, mentors and others we look up to can inspire us.

The four elements ensure the success of student support:

- **Preparation.** Mentors and educators were fully briefed and understood the complexities of the task at hand. A combination of experience and ability to build respectful bonds and boundaries with students and teachers gave all a clear understanding of mutual expectations.
- **Negotiating.** Clear and concise instructions and a willingness to partake in respectful, honest dialogue ensured that all parties felt heard, understood and willing to be receptive to the ideas of others.
- **Enabling growth.** Mentors and teachers encouraged students to step out of their comfort zones. Mentors recognised, celebrated and rewarded each achievement and urged students to do the same.
- **Closure.** The programme had clearly defined objectives.
- Following the set tasks and steps, the students came to a successful programme end and results. It left students with a sense of fulfilment and achievement.

2. Teachers.

Teachers' work with teams plays a crucial role in the project's success in the online environment. When the student companies work online and do not meet each other in person, they need more guidance and support to bring the business ideas further. Each team has one assigned teacher to work with and help them create prototypes and final presentations.

Teachers organized individual meetings with all their teams to coach them and help them move forward with the company. These individual meetings took place twice a month on virtual meeting platforms. For more accessible communication with the students, the teachers were also a part of the team's WhatsApp group, where teachers could give guidance during individual meetings. In addition, the teachers met their groups in virtual workshops. During the workshops, each team worked in a separate breakout room. The teachers switched between the breakout rooms to help with their tasks.

Teachers were also responsible for the progress of their teams. They worked as mentors for their teams throughout the project and were there for them when needed.

Once a month, a meeting for teachers took place. During the meetings, the teachers discussed groups' progress and shared ideas.

To implement such and similar programs in the future, we also recommend implementing measures to motivate and improve the competence of teachers, such as networking, train-the-trainers, etc.

3. Mentors, entrepreneurs, investors and other experts.

Mentoring is a relationship between two people (in this case, a team & a mentor) with the goal of professional and personal development. The mentor is usually an experienced individual who shares knowledge, experience, and advice with a less experienced person or mentee.

The programme Teaming UP enlisted the programme mentors and other experts, investors and inspiring entrepreneurs based on specific criteria and expertise in critical business areas such as financial planning and price policy, marketing, sales, prototyping, business scalability and others. The student teams, many of which have little to no previous business experience, need strong mentors and experts who can work together with students as one. Mentors and experts have to be able to unleash the potential of strong-willed and ambitious young individuals. Alongside vast business knowledge, mentors and experts also need to be apt in relationship building and understanding the complexity of the task at hand. The relationship must be based on trust, confidentiality, mutual respect and sensitivity.

The goal of the mentors, experts, entrepreneurs and investors was to pass on their business knowledge to the teams and share valuable life experiences, helping students grow and become better versions of themselves. Individual and group goals were set in every session between the mentors and students, introducing the students to new ways of thinking, challenging any limiting beliefs, and sharing valuable life lessons.

Due to Covid, remote or online mentoring and consultancy replaced the traditional face to face mentoring and consultancy. With multi-national teams in different countries, regular events were scheduled, allowing online group meetings, which ensured the continuation of student learning and development.

Teachers also participated in mentoring and consultancy sessions, which gave the teams additional support and guidance as they navigated the tasks and challenges set. In some cases, due to broken communication, teachers acted as intermediaries between the mentor or the expert and the team, which helped to move forward successfully.

4. Cross-border cooperation.

Cross-border cooperation is essential, as the programme's aim is to establish cross-border business ideas and student companies with team participants from at least two countries. The project Teaming UP established a partnership between vocational education institutions from Valmiera (Latvia), Valga (Estonia) and Vantaa (Finland).

The program can be implemented by forming teams with participants from different countries or regions. The choice of international or regional partners, preferably with a shared vision and mutual understanding, is crucial for successful cooperation.

It is cross-border cooperation that allows participants to meet different young people from other countries and learn about different mentalities, views and ways of thinking.

It not only provides growth for the young people themselves, forcing them out of their usual comfort zone, but also benefits teachers and contributes to developing the business idea on a larger scale.

5. Structured but flexible programme.

In the programme of international student companies, the programme itself is critical. It must be structured so that young people get all the necessary knowledge and support to develop a business idea. At the same time, the programme must be flexible and easy to adapt to the online environment, given the constraints of a global pandemic, such as being forced to work remotely.

The project team involving business teachers and entrepreneurs from Latvia, Estonia and Finland has created 12-step plan for educational institutions to implement an international student company programme. Through the steps, young people gradually go through business development phases to understand the entrepreneurial environment and build confidence and necessary skills. For the programme to be effective, workshops and training should occur once a week or once every two weeks. To keep the students' attention and activity, the length of each workshop should be 1.5 to 2 hours.

1. **Introduction.** A brief introduction to the program as a whole and the next steps. Getting to know what business is. Engaging atmosphere through virtual ice-breakers, games and exciting tasks.
2. **Team creation and team building.** Creating international teams using attractive match-making and other tools. Establishing roles and responsibilities for each student within their teams. Organizing team building activities. Teams brainstorm first potential business ideas.
3. **Developing business ideas.** Discussing and developing specific cross-border business ideas for each team. Defining the problems that these ideas solve; why would people be interested in using the product or service. Teams get acquainted with a structured form of presentation that they will use during the final event – Pitching to investors”. The presentation is a key document that they work with filling in during the whole programme.
4. **Mentor speed-dating.** Meeting with mentors, the internationally-recognized business experts. Teams present business ideas and receive feedback from mentors on necessary next steps and changes. Filling out the Value Proposition Canvas with the support of mentors.
5. **Inspirational day.** Students from each country visit local businesses, makerspaces or start-up hubs to see the actual work environment, hear inspirational success stories and network with the business community. The experience helps students clarify their products or services and get ideas about the production (materials, devices, skills) and delivery channels to the customers.
6. **Customer profile. Marketing.** Each team defines the customer profile by answering specific questions, e.g., who are my customers; where do they work; what are their hobbies; what problems do they have; what is their family status; through what informational channels can I reach them; what kind of language do they use; what is their income; what makes them happy, etc. At the end of

the task, teams should know who their client is and how to reach it. According to the collected information, teams create the marketing plan.

7. **Product Development and Design.** Each team creates their product design, incl. sketches or descriptions, and presents them to teachers and mentors. Mentors give feedback on necessary improvements and changes. It's a good idea for teams to show product sketches and get feedback from at least a few people who represent their target audience - potential clients. Students can turn the prototype sketches and descriptions into actual prototypes in collaboration with a maker space. The Teaming UP programme showed that involving students in prototyping is an excellent tool for fostering motivation.
8. **Financial planning.** Planning and calculating the student company cash flow, incl. total revenue, total costs, total profit, and product cost. Identifying ways to attract other funding and venture capital.
9. **Digital Marketing and E-commerce.** It is crucial to be familiar with digital communication, marketing and sales tools to reach customers everywhere. Teams learned how to create and run an online store. Every team chose three leading social media platforms that are most suitable for their customers. Teachers and mentors encouraged teams to develop their product or student company page on at least one of the platforms.
10. **Pitching workshop.** Introducing students to the concept and the principles of pitching. Sharing the best ways to pitch the business ideas. Showing good presenting practices and tricks on attracting and retaining attention and engaging the audience.
11. **Mentor speed-dating: pitching rehearsal.** Pitching rehearsal supports students for the Pitching to Investors - the final event. Teams practice pitching in front of one or several mentors, who provide feedback and recommendations on necessary improvements and changes in their presentations. Mentors also give student companies insight on how to proceed with their companies after the end of the programme.
12. **The final event Pitching to investors.** The programme closing event is when the teams pitch their business ideas to 4 to 6 real investors, showing the presentation they have developed during the whole programme. The pitch is fast-paced (max 5 minutes). The presentation covers all the aspects of developing a business that students got to know during workshops, mentor speed-dating, and other activities. Teams introduce investors to the business model, product, prototype, basic cash flow and other aspects. Investors provide feedback and ask questions, and teams give answers. At the end of the event, the best teams are awarded, taking into account the team's overall achievements, the pitch results, and the student motivation programme (Grand Prix).

6. Financial resources.

The availability of financial resources plays a vital role in the future implementation of such or similar programmes for international student companies. Teaming UP partners recommend the following potential sources of funding:

- Cross-border funding programmes, such as Interreg, Erasmus+ and others, where educational institutions can get involved in international partnerships and

attract the necessary funding for salaries, administrative costs, events, experts etc.;

- National and regional funding programmes;
- An educational institution can allocate funding from its budget to implement the programme in addition to the primary curriculum or to integrate the programme into the primary curriculum. In this case, the main challenge is finding and agreeing with the equivalent educational institutions that can also provide funding from the budget;
- Attracting donations from the private sector, encouraging it to get involved in activities to promote youth entrepreneurship.

7. Durability, transferability, and accessibility of the programme results.

As the programs of international student companies are not a very common practice, the results and process descriptions of such or similar programmes must be available to those who also want to implement them in their educational institutions.

To ensure accessibility, it is essential to make all materials, results and programme information available, especially online.

To achieve transferability, it is vital to discuss the programme and its results and impact in various forums and conferences for educational institutions and specialists. An international conference was held at the end of the Teaming UP programme, and its recordings are available on the Youtube platform. Teachers and partners in Latvia, Estonia, Finland and other countries were also informed about the programme's implementation and its results in e-mail news.

The durability and sustainability of the programme depend mainly on the available resources described above in this document and the motivation of educational institutions to continue the programme. Teachers, mentors, and investors informed students about future business development opportunities, including business incubators and other programs. An exciting result of the Teaming UP programme is the availability of student company products in the Mercuria online store, thus encouraging students to continue developing their business ideas after the programme (<https://shop.mercuria.fi/c/tuotteet/teaming-up-products>).