

Developing innovative training protocol for export personnel in the fashion industries through “Extro Skills” project

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Abstract. The paper presents the objectives, the planned outputs and the innovative aspects of the project entitled “Developing new skills for the extroversion specializations of fashion industry in Europe”, acronym EXTRO SKILLS, which is co-financed by the European Commission under the Erasmus+ Programme, Key Action 2 - Strategic Partnerships. This is a 30 months project and started on December 1-st, 2015. The project aims to bridge the gap between fashion industries and lack of specific expertise and experts of SMEs in these industries. Fashion industries require a more qualified workforce and, therefore, the availability of adequately skilled workers and trained and qualified personnel for their export and fashion marketing departments has become one of the major issues. The new curricula that will be developed in the project will offer essential transversal skills for a quick and qualified response to the international trade and market demands and for enhancing the extroversion and the competitiveness of the fashion industry. The learning content will be tailored to the needs of export and fashion marketing personnel. The constitution of the partnership was based on the cooperation between education and employment in order to better achieve the objectives of the project. The project consortium includes six partners from five countries (Greece, Belgium, Romania, Spain and UK).

1. Context of the project

Nowadays, the fashion industries are subjected to a continuing restructuring and modernization that is due to many causes, resulting from the trade liberalization and increasing external competition, consumer developments, technological advances, changes in production costs and environmental issues.

According to the European Commission, “*European fashion and high-end industries represent European cultural heritage and know-how. These industries are a significant part of the creative economy and form complex and strongly interlinked value chains from design and manufacturing to the distribution and retail of fashion goods*” [1]. As a result, these industries require a more qualified workforce and, therefore, the availability of adequately skilled workers and trained and qualified personnel for their export and fashion marketing departments has become one of the major issues.

Recognizing their critical role, the European Skills Council of Textile Clothing Leather & Footwear and the European Fashion Industries Alliance, have come together in order to strengthen the advantages of the fashion industries which include, among others, the well-educated and high-skilled professional workforce of the industry.



2. Project objectives

2.1. General objective

The general objective of the project is to enhance the employability of the European fashion industry workforce by promoting a deeper match between the labor market outcomes and needs (new objective of the Bruges Copenhagen process) [2] and, in particular, those linked with technological innovation (New skills for new jobs). Moreover, the project aims to ensure that qualification profiles are defined according to the analysis of the professional and training needs and that learning outcomes are continuously readjusted taking into account the innovative context [3].

The project also aims to bridge the gap between fashion industries and lack of specific expertise and experts of SMEs in the fashion industries.

The new curricula that will be developed will offer essential transversal skills for a quick and qualified response to the international trade and market demands and for enhancing the extroversion and the competitiveness of the fashion industry. The learning content will be tailored to the needs of export and fashion marketing personnel.

2.2. Specific objectives and expected results

The key output of EXTRO SKILLS project is an innovative training protocol oriented to European fashion companies in order to encourage them to internationalize their actions.

According to the key output, the project specific objectives can be summarized as follows:

- Development of a new European ICT-based training protocol (Curricula for VET including a qualification and recognition framework) to enhance knowledge, skills and competences of export and fashion marketing experts, following a holistic, approach that brings together different sectors of fashion industry and views them under a common training umbrella. The training protocol will be hosted in a digital platform boosting e-learning method in life - long learning approach;
- Establishment of an integrated framework for cross-sector certification of export and fashion marketing personnel, increasing transparency, comparability and validation of qualifications (European standard as per EQF);
- The definition and development of a Curriculum for the VET as an European Standard, including a qualification and recognition framework;
- Improvement and extension of high quality learning opportunities tailored to the needs of export and fashion marketing personnel, operating within the entire spectrum of fashion industries;
- The contribution to the modernisation and professionalism of SME's through the use of a high quality ICT Tool;
- Establishment of close cooperation between formal education providers and businesses in order to increase the market relevance of the proposed training protocol;
- Define a professional profile for the exports and fashion marketing employees, focused on SMEs.

3. Intellectual outputs

3.1. Quality and Evaluation Management Plan

The Quality and Evaluation Management Plan documents the necessary information required to effectively manage project quality from project planning to delivery. It defines a project's quality policies, procedures, criteria for and areas of application, and roles, responsibilities and authorities. Its purpose is to serve as a flexible tool that can be modified during its implementation if necessary.

3.2. Methodological Guidelines for the Research and Need Analysis

This intellectual output contains the methodological guidelines for the desk research and needs analysis including also the conceptual background with terminology and definitions. Furthermore, it provides a detailed description of the methodology used to achieve the aims and objectives of the next IOs i.e. contextual framework for the research, desk-based research, qualitative methods of data

collection, etc.) as well as general guidelines on how to interpret the results and to analyse findings identified from the research.

Common templates for the collection of data and information were provided both for the literature review and next intellectual outputs development, in order to promote standardisation and support cross-case comparison.

The Methodological Guidelines also provides a base of information at EU level on existing mechanisms and arrangements facilitating permeability in education and training, relating with ECVET and EQF principles.

3.3. Study for the Development of Sectoral Methods for Anticipation of High Skills Needs

The purpose of the study is to detect and identify exports' staff skills needs and the existing gaps in EU MSME and to develop sectoral methods for their anticipation. Questionnaires were elaborated and distributed to companies.

The questionnaire was structured on the project needs so that its questions were related to three core main areas:

- Profile of the companies
- Exports' experience and knowledge for the exports profile of the sector in each country
- Identification of skill needs and gaps

The questionnaire is structured in four sections:

Section 1: Information about the company

Section 2: Company's export history

Section 3: Importance of exporting

Section 4: Rating of knowledge

Each section contains a number of questions related to the section's core area. In that way they can give a perspective about the enterprises' size, their exporting activity, their exporting experience and their needs at European level.

The results of the study represent the input for the design of the professional qualification of export and fashion marketing departments' experts.

3.4. Data Collection Report

The survey has been conducted in 12 EU countries (Greece, Spain, Romania, UK, Belgium, Portugal, Hungary, Bulgaria, France, Italy, Lithuania and Croatia) and there have been received responses from 117 companies. The targeted companies were classed as Micro, Small, Medium and Big (according to SME's EU definition) from textiles and clothing sector.

The data collected from the survey questionnaires were analyzed both qualitative and quantitative. The two types of analyses had different but complementary objectives allowing full exploitation of data gathered.

The qualitative analysis aimed at cross-checking of the questionnaire responses and related comments, in order to draw a reliable and accurate "profile" for each country and allow in-depth country comparisons for selected key items.

The quantitative analysis was based on using statistical methods to identify patterns, correlations and rankings of countries, the relationship between export activities, the size of the company and their skill needs and opinion about e-learning and use of a digital training platform.

3.5. Design of the Professional qualifications

The aim of the output is to develop a reference frame for the professions in the export and fashion marketing departments related to two necessary professions in the sector: export officer and fashion marketing officer. Such a common reference forms a common interpretative framework used to establish coherency between qualifications in each country.

The description of qualifications will be based on learning outcomes, regardless of how or where these are achieved.

3.6. *Curricula Framework*

Previous outputs will be the inputs for the production of the curricula framework.

This will include:

- an introductory part of specific knowledge and skills needed for staff;
- a fundamental part consisting in a number of compulsory subjects that will cover knowledge and skills necessary to manage complex export and fashion marketing issues;
- a complementary part according to the needs of students with different backgrounds willing to specialize in exports and fashion marketing.

3.7. *Courses for VET*

This output is about the development of the contents of the *Export and Fashion Marketing Curricula* (teaching materials), and will further identify what subjects/courses/modules will be taught. This output will be a natural continuation of the Curricula Framework and its objective is to create a curricula based on export management and fashion marketing principles, including consumer-driven and demand-driven approaches.

The courses will cover recent trends of fashion marketing and expo's evaluation in the global market, market's development, development of the demand of sector's products, consumer's behaviours, trend analysis, demand chain, mechanisms for direct distribution of a product to international markets (by identifying customers; meeting their needs; implementing sales plans). Also courses will concentrate information and data regarding third countries market mechanisms and their function market's technical requirements. These courses will be part of the input of the ICT tool - Digital Platform.

3.8. *Set-Up of the Digital Platform*

This output refers to the Moodle Platform that will be customized to fit the needs of the project.

3.9. *Pilot Tests*

The objective of the output is to test, in real life conditions, the complete platform, providing the feedback for adjustment and customization according to the final users' requirements and demands.

4. **Conclusions**

The results of the project will fill the gap between fashion industries and lack of specific expertise and experts of SMEs in these industries which require a more qualified workforce and adequately skilled and qualified personnel for their export and fashion marketing departments. The new curricula that will be developed in the project will offer essential transversal skills for a quick and qualified response to the international trade and market demands and for enhancing the extroversion and the competitiveness of the fashion industry.

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- [3] <http://extroskills.eu/en/project>.