DEAL
Digital Entrepreneurship for Adult Learners

OPERATIONAL MANUAL
Official Deliverable of Intellectual Output 4

www.projectdeal.eu

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Introduction

An Operational Manual serves many purposes. It is a key determinant to assure quality, maximise dissemination, and future proof impact. It also significantly optimises mainstreaming in a valorisation context.

The DEAL Operational Manual is a set of transparent guidelines designed to mainstream and sustain project results beyond the project lifespan. It is aimed at policymakers and practitioners operating in the EU (EEA) education/training ecosystem who wish to embed the DEAL experience in their operational activities. The DEAL project https://www.projectdeal.eu/index.php , approved by EC evaluators, took place during two years from 2020 – 2022 and meets the identified needs of low skilled adults, specifically by offering them the transformational opportunity to start up a Digital Enterprise by means of self- directed learning via an innovative user friendly Open Education platform and ancillary tools.

The Manual is the capstone element of the DEAL Erasmus+ project and is grounded in evidence-based research spanning 4 countries in addition to a pan-EU perspective. It was piloted with a statistically valid number of participants and validated by 7 partner organisations who brought a wealth of knowledge, skills and competence to the project and provides for guidance to teachers/tutors/coaches on the delivery means, the structure of the Testing and Validation workshops, recommendations on blended learning capabilities and implementation of the OER eLearning modalities.

Based on findings from the Testing and Validation phase, the Manual offers clear guidelines for the adoption of the training resources, materials and tools. It gives detailed information on operational and managerial features, including the delivery mechanisms and other operational aspects of the training. This document incorporates lessons learnt for the benefit of stakeholders who want practical, concise and applicable information as pointers to adaptation. In its comprehensive Testing and Validation phase, the response from representative end users was overwhelmingly positive. This Manual is designed to be a practical and relevant guide of proven reliability which we are confident will enable interested parties to leverage for their learners the impactful benefits accruing from the DEAL project.

For a concise and comprehensive overview on project's results, work breakdown structure and deliverables, please consult Appendix 1.

1. Outline and Structure of Training Material

The following indications have been shared for the appropriate training development of DEAL contents:

- **General considerations**
- **Module's PPT template**
- **Training fiche template**

Other general recommendation that we followed for the development of the material are as follows:

1. Courses are to be elaborated with a simple terminology in order to fit all levels of education
2. Courses should be clear, easy and usable
3. Courses include detailed learning outcomes, a general description, keywords, self-assessment tool (5 multiple-choice questions per module), bibliography, glossary entries and all relevant information included in the training fiche
4. Online courses should not last more than 45 minutes, in order to keep users' attention, therefore the total length of 1500 words/ 10 pages max are recommended.
5. Short and attractive/catchy titles
6. Training content in easy to use, short and "crisp" micro-training fiches and custom-made based on users' needs
7. Each partner develops 1 training fiche and 1 ppt per assigned module. Contents are arranged in:
   a. Modules
      i. Didactic Unit
         1. Sub-sections with contents in text format
8. Each training includes:
   a. Practical tips (1 per module)
   b. Glossary entries (5 per module)
   c. Bibliography
   d. 1 self-assessment evaluation test with 5 true/false or multiple-choice questions and related answers
   e. Short animations: if needed they can be developed with free tools such as Powtoon, which is free for 3-minutes video. Once elaborated they are shared with the official YouTube channel and embedded from there on the OER platform to optimize server resources and boost YouTube channel visibility.

In the two annexes attached to the document, readers and users will find the PPT Template (Annex 1) and. Doc Fiche Template used by partners to develop and frame the training material (Annex 2). The content of the fiche includes the following fields to be filled in to ensure uniformity and coherence among training contents developed:

2.   The Testing and Validation of training material

The term Testing is self-explanatory. CEDEFOP defines Validation as:

"Confirmation by a competent body that learning outcomes (knowledge, skills and/or competences) acquired by an individual in a formal, non-formal or informal setting have been assessed against predetermined criteria and are compliant with a validation standard"[1].

DEAL's Testing & Validation objectives were (1) to deliver tutor led training to 150 learners in workshop settings, (2) to collate, analyse and consolidate feedback in a fine-tuning phase and (3) finalise the content including translations and development of guidelines for further adoption of the training.

Having regard to the particular Health and Safety protocols pertaining to Covid-19 in the multijurisdictional context of the DEAL partnership at the time, tutors were urged to come up with creative solutions in exploiting the possibilities offered by a blended learning format.

The outcome, where blended learning took place, was a seamless transition and a strong endorsement of the format as a vehicle particularly suited to a project whose aim is to equip adult learners with Digital Enterprise Knowledge, Skills and Competence.

The methodology employed in the course of the training phase in 2022 was inspired by the KASH conceptual framework (Knowledge, Attitude, Skills, Habit) and tutors' overarching strategy was learner agency via co-construction.

As a starting point, Icebreakers were recommended to build up trust and self-confidence, optimise group interaction and peer to peer learning using Challenge Based Learning with a judicious selection from a dashboard of micro-challenges.

It was suggested that the participants be made aware that they were in a safe space conducive to "unlearning", the purpose being from a group dynamic perspective, to empower participants to feel free to express opinions without the threat of group or tutor disapproval.

Throughout the training sessions and within the KASH framework, the signature tool was Gamification whose purpose in this context was defined as the leveraging of competitive impulses to stimulate reflection and bring about mind-set and behavioural change.

- Knowledge was tested using quizzes and the format was left to the judgment and discretion of each individual tutor respecting each partner country's cultural norms.
- Attitude was addressed using Scenario Based Learning where interactive and immersive scenario building can be framed in conjunction with game elements built around Entrepreneurship Narratives leading to personalised action plans.
- Skills were evaluated using team presentations where participants formed teams tasked with the composition of a notional Digital Enterprise idea. Participants were reminded that they needed to produce a business idea which they could unpack. It was not expected that detailed costings would be produced. It was merely required that learners show evidence of how to research relevant elements of the Modules and that they could justify their findings. Each team would then present orally to a panel.
- Habit was explored using Case Studies with a particular focus on Best Practice. It was recommended that Case Studies be used to evaluate whether participants showed a budding

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[1] Source: CEDEFOP, 2008; Council of Europe, 2012.

Habit i.e., that they are already beginning to feel at ease in the role of Digital Entrepreneur. In this phase Case Studies were used strategically to enable the participants and tutors assess the effectiveness of participant OER engagement. Case Studies are deemed particularly suited to Digital Technology and are included in the DEAL Toolkit as a dynamic learning tool to engage, motivate and enthuse Adult Learners.

It was advised that the tutors select an eclectic mix of appropriate Gamification tools to facilitate participants' entry to the Entrepreneurship habitus where uncertainty is endemic and change the only constant.

While Gamification was the main tool, it was recommended that one or more guest speakers should be invited to make their experiences in Digital Enterprise start-ups available to the participants. The latter should receive copies of such presentations in advance to fully exploit in follow-up Q & A sessions the benefits provided by hands-on practitioners.

As a Quality Assurance measure, two satisfaction surveys were deployed – one for participants and one for tutors. A key aspect of the surveys was a sharp focus on the degree to which end users would find the OER fit for purpose when the tutor led sheltered environment of the Pilot & Testing phase scaffolding was removed and what recommendations as to the measures, if any, were needed to counteract this.

The satisfaction surveys were not seen as a mere box ticking exercise but built around three fundamental questions:
● Is the platform user friendly and easily navigable?
● Are the Module contents useful, appropriate, and effective?
● Would aspiring Digital Entrepreneurs find the OER helpful?

The results of the Testing and Validation phase of the project, including lessons learnt, indicated a very positive take-up with participants confirming the capacity of self-directed aspiring Digital Entrepreneurs to use the OER without scaffolding.

The DEAL consortium can unreservedly attest to the integrity of DEAL's Testing and Validation process and recommends the methodology to policymakers, practitioners and relevant stakeholders.

3. Organisation of the training

The partners in DEAL use different methods to organise the training in their validation work. Some had face2face training sessions while others had online training sessions:

"Due to the Covid-19 situation we organised the training online via Zoom platform.
We piloted two training courses in one session. The OER platform contents are perfectly adapted to online training through platforms such as Zoom or Skype. Each course lasted 1 hour. During that time the teacher explain the content, provide examples, and ask attendees questions. As DEAL is concerned with the experience of adult learners, it was agreed that two modules would be tested with adult learning tutors in order to get input from a teaching as well as learning perspective"

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4.   Communication with targets and potential attendees: Recruitment and Enrolment

IN DEAL the partners used different methods to reach out to the participants, both online and face2face:

In order to recruit the target groups, we contacted several national associations by email, informing them of the date, characteristics and objectives of the training. We also provide the link to participate in the online training. It is interesting to use social networks to reach as many interested parties as possible. Communication with target groups and potential attendees was through e-mail and social networks, both our own and those of our associates."

5.   Classroom Management

IN DEAL validation process the partners used the material in different training settings. Some presented the training contents in an online session. They used the official ppts, and the trainers explained the contents using the ppt and online examples to show the applicability of the presented concepts:

- After the training session, we recommended that attendees go over the DEAL OER Platform's online content, test their knowledge through the online self-assessment test, and complete the online feedback form.
- The training sessions were online with the intervention of a trainer to streamline the session, answer participants' questions and collect feedback on the training.
- From the tutor testing perspective, all testing by tutors/coordinators was carried out online and all those participating then completed the feedback forms.
- The possibility to record training sessions can give participants a chance to go over the material again when needed in their own time.

6.   Learners' Motivation

Adult learners were quite motivated about the usefulness of the contents presented. In general, all contents were considered useful and interesting, highlighting the valuable tools for business start-up and development. We also noted the interest of the adult learners through their questions and comments during the course. In general, all the comments were quite positive.

All adult learners were happy to know that they could access the platform to follow other courses in addition to the ones presented to increase their knowledge.

A few mentioned the importance of having examples or stories from real life both for understanding the material better and to remember.

7.   Learners' Feedback

Collecting feedback from participants is a useful way to improve the quality of the training and to get new ideas for future training sessions. Feedback can be collected informally in a discussion with the participants, this often gives useful results. This can be collected during the sessions or afterwards face2face (or using phone or online). Written feedback can be collected both online (with e.g. Microsoft Forms, Google Forms, Survey Monkey and Jamboard) for quick and direct overall feedback from attendees – and offline with written feedback forms depending on what fits the training group best.

One partner also organised a brainstorming session at the end of the course collecting suggestions and ideas, reading out loud the questions from the feedback form template.

The collected feedback during the validation period was very positive in general:

- Students felt that the contents of the training were mainly practical. They considered that it met their current needs.
- One of the most positive aspects is that the training contents were adapted to a basic level of knowledge; This is considered advantageous to keep the attention on the training, not disconnect.
- The length and arrangement of the units were considered adequate. It encourages active learning.
- Participants like the number of courses, the variety of content, the availability of all the material in 4 languages and the possibility to download the courses.
- In addition, adult learner tutors and coordinators who had tested two of the modules felt that the material was well presented and accessible with the content being informative and useful.
- The participants liked that the information is presented using language which is clear, concise and easy to understand with easy-to-follow direction.

8. Recommendations on how best to deliver training in diverse operational settings

- It is useful to combine the training material with additional real live examples to show the usefulness of the concepts learned in the real world.
- Each course session lasted one hour. Maybe a little more time per session would be more appropriate to include practical activities or tips. For example, create an essential website or a blog or design an online presence campaign.
- When teaching online it can be useful to record the sessions and share with the participants. This gave all participants the possibility to go over the material in a time that suited each and everyone.
- A few participants commented on the importance of an engaged teacher. „It is very good how the teacher does not read directly what is on the slides but discussed the material and added examples, that makes it more easy to remember."
- A few participants mentioned how useful it was to have Practical advice in end of each PPT and that the advice was practical and easy to implement

9. LESSONS LEARNT

1. Overall, the feedback indicated that the OER consisted of simple, easily-digestible points and tips for potential digital entrepreneurs.
2. The points were easy to read and understand and contained by and large relevant and useful information.
3. The step-by-step order of the points optimised end user interaction.
4. The visuals were excellent and would be of great assistance to users whose learning style is predominantly visual.
5. The modules went a long way to demystify Digital Skills for end users who might approach this aspect with trepidation.
6. At the same time there was enough scope in the modules to encourage reflection, agency, engagement and personal development.
7. It is easy to overlook some items in a Glossary. One of the lessons learnt is that it is crucial for the users that all potential problematic terms are included and that the Glossary be presented in alphabetical order.
8. As Adult Education specialists, EQUAL Ireland had some reservations about the term 'Modules' which in Ireland has certain very specific academic connotations and expectations. In accredited academic programmes a pillar of module architecture is the alignment of Aims,

Learning Outcomes, Syllabus Content and Assessment with Knowledge, Skills and Competence mapped against National Qualification Framework level descriptors. The term 'module' can also prove puzzling to DEAL target end users who by definition might have little or no understanding of what the term means. Furthermore, the term's polyvalency might present a problem in a multicultural setting. The term 'unit' might have been more appropriate, but the Pilot & Testing phase did not show that the participants had any difficulty with the term 'module'.

9. The 12 modules deal overwhelmingly with Digital Skills. While it is good that Digital Marketing is included, certain standard, generic titles relating to business start-ups, including online, such as Feasibility Analysis, Market Research and Business Plan along with specialised marketing modules such as Influencer Marketing and Branding are normally included in similar programmes.

10. A key contemporary topic is 'greening'. This would involve the inclusion of thematic titles such as Packaging and Logistics which would have reflected concerns of relevance to all businesses.

11. The lesson learnt was that additional background material was required.

12. A key question was whether the target end users would be able to use the OER without 'scaffolding' i.e. without a facilitating tutor to help them navigate the OER. The lesson learnt from the Pilot and Testing phase was that this was entirely possible and this point was reinforced by the feedback from the adult learner tutors/coordinators who also tested two of the modules.

13. As the duration of the DEAL Project coincided with the onset and fall-out from the Coronavirus, the decision to cancel Transnational Meetings and replace them with monthly jour fixe remote meetings was viewed at first with some trepidation by the Coordinator – EQUAL Ireland. The received wisdom was that the loss of face to face meetings would have a negative effect on the Project trajectory. However this was not the case. The monthly meetings ensured a more focused management, which led to an enhanced QA oversight and greatly strengthened the collegial endeavours of the Project partners.

14. Although the regular monthly Zoom meetings ensured a tight collaboration, the Project might have benefitted from a Project Management tool. However as this was not included in the Project Application, it did not arise.

10.   Appendix 1 - The DEAL project

The context and or background to the DEAL Project is the deficit in entrepreneurship digital skills identified by the EU Commission, the associated unemployment statistics (see below) and the opportunity presented by digitalization, especially in the area of developing self-employment - entrepreneurship opportunities in particular for the older, rural female worker.

DEAL supports especially vulnerable target groups who are preparing for the unavoidable impact of digitalization. External global drivers of change such as rapidly changing technologies, globalization, climate change and urbanization have significant impacts on enterprises nationally and at a European level.

PROJECT OBJECTIVES

A key objective in the Testing and Validation phase involves the recruitment of a targeted 150 participants from low income, older rural and female cohorts. The aim is to offer these participants a specially designed education and training programme to provide them with identified knowledge, skills and competence to develop the necessary self-confidence to take advantage of digitalization for the purpose of developing self-employment entrepreneurship opportunities.

PROJECT ACTIVITIES

WORK BREAKDOWN STRUCTURE

Intellectual Output 1

Developing a user-friendly Open Educational Resource Platform for the purpose of hosting our Education and Training Programme and Associated Resources for the benefit of the Target Group. Available at: https://www.projectdeal.eu/

Intellectual Output 2

Mapping Dynamics and Trends of the Silver Economy and Active Ageing for the purpose of ensuring, through the production of a comparative Country Map, using a common methodology, of the existing and emerging dynamics and trends of the silver economy and active ageing, so as to ensure that the currency, relevance and practicality of the proposed education and training programme responds to the actual and not some perceived needs of the Target Group. Mapping results are available at https://www.projectdeal.eu/mapping.php

Intellectual Output 3

Training and Resources Toolkit for the purpose of imparting relevant Knowledge, Skills and Competence to the Target Group. A total of 52 courses and 52 training fiches are available in all languages (13 per language) with explanatory videos, more than 900 users have used DEAL Training, 48 case studies are available in all languages (12 per language), 202 glossary entries have been included in all languages with more than 40000 unique visits collected so far.

Intellectual Output 4

Producing the DEAL Operational Manual and Position Paper that you are currently reading to enable other Organisations and Users to understand, operationalise and benefit from the Projects outcomes and outputs into the foreseeable future. Both documents are available at: https://www.projectdeal.eu/op-manual.php

KEY PROJECT RESULTS AND IMPACT, in brief…

- Successful delivery on time and as originally described
- Full compliance with the Funding Agency's requirements
- A cohort of trained individuals, drawn from the target group who have the knowledge, skills and competence, as well as the self-confidence to develop self-employment opportunities through entrepreneurship.
- A relevant education and training programme (in the area of Digital Entrepreneurship and Self Employment Opportunities) and associated Resources freely available to all
- Operational Manual and Position Paper making the results and outcomes of the project truly transparent and available for further exploitation
- A reduction in the number of EU Citizens who do not have digital skills
- An increase in the number of EU Citizens self-employed through their own efforts as a result of having benefited from the education and training programme originated by the DEAL Project

Specific groups such as women, rural dwellers and older people will gain particular benefits from DEAL as the project supports these cohorts to address the very specific challenges they face