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1. Introduction

This document was developed as part of the **ACE – Accelerating Cross-border Engagement** (Accelerating the early Engagement of highly innovative ICT start-ups, SMEs and entrepreneurs in Cross-Border cooperation and venturing) project funded by the European Union Seventh Framework Programme (FP7/2007-2013) under the grant agreement no. 610925.

The overall objective of ACE is to accelerate the early engagement of highly innovative ICT start-ups, SMEs and entrepreneurs in cross-border cooperation and venturing in order to boost their growth.

This document corresponds to the **ACE Quality Management System (QMS)**, which forms **Deliverable 4.1 (D4.1) of Work Package 4 (WP4)**, as described in the Description of Work of the project.

WP4 relates to the **quality management & impact assessment of the ACE programme**. Its actions were designed to ensure the ACE operational programme is implemented in adherence with the principles of quality management which will allow for the reliable evaluation of outcome and results, continuous process improvement and most importantly the sustainability and expansion of the network outside of the ACE partners.

WP4 aims to achieve the following objectives:

- To put in place an **effective quality management system supporting the ACE framework** which will lead to **effective programme implementation and expansion to new partners**
- To develop credible impact measurement tools
- To prepare a sustainability and expansion strategy for the ACE programme

This document details the elements of the **ACE QMS** that aim to support the ACE framework. These elements include the organizational structure, procedures, processes and resources needed to be acknowledged and put in place by the ACE partners from the outset of the project.

ACE Project VS ACE Programme

It is relevant at this stage to make a distinction between the **ACE project** and the **ACE programme**.

The delivery of the ACE pilot programme (activities under WP3 – Programme Implementation & Review) can be seen as the main result of the ACE project, but this one is not limited to the programme itself. This document takes into account the project as a whole, from the design of the programme, its launch and cooperation summit, to its implementation and review, impact assessment, dissemination and project management activities. Nevertheless, the ACE QMS attempts to focus on the ACE programme rather than on the overall project.

A major outcome of the ACE project is the expansion of the ACE network to new partners, such as incubators, accelerators and clusters across Europe. It is expected that the ACE pilot programme forms the basis for the launch of new ACE programmes in existing and new partner countries, thus supporting a greater number of ICT companies. The ACE QMS aims to facilitate this goal, thus the present document addresses the ACE programme.

Indeed, the individual elements of the ACE QMS will be reviewed and updated as the project progresses, so that at the end of the project the QMS will be capable of managing the quality of delivery of the ACE programme across a much larger network of partners and associate partners than at project inception. In addition, it is important to note that the activities of WP6 – Project Management address the quality of the ACE project.

2. ACE QMS

This document provides the guidelines for the implementation of an internal Quality Management System (QMS) to support the ACE framework from the outset of the project.

The main goals of the ACE QMS are:

- To ensure an effective and efficient programme implementation;
- To optimize and improve the activities of the programme;
- To achieve participants' satisfaction;
- To guarantee the continuous improvement and quality of the programme;
- To facilitate the expansion of the programme to new partners and associate members.

To achieve these goals, the ACE QMS defines certain elements needed to implement quality management:

- 1) Organizational structure and responsibilities of partners;
- 2) Data management;
- 3) Processes of implementing the ACE programme;
- 4) Resources;
- 5) Customer satisfaction;
- 6) Continuous improvement;
- 7) Quality of results (impact measurement tools);
- 8) Transparency and independent audit (external High Level Advisory Board).

These elements were defined in accordance with the ACE Programme Design (D1.1) and with general quality management principles, and are detailed in the upcoming subsections.

2.1 Organizational structure and responsibilities of partners

This section defines the ACE organizational structure required to implement the ACE programme at individual partner and overall consortium level. It aims to clarify the partners' responsibilities and involve them in the quality management processes.

The organizational structure of the ACE pilot programme corresponds to the structure of the ACE project. Given the ambitious scope of the project and the relatively large size of the consortium, the partners have agreed on a three-tiered approach to project management and decision making and a high level advisory board, as summarised in the diagram presented in Figure 1.

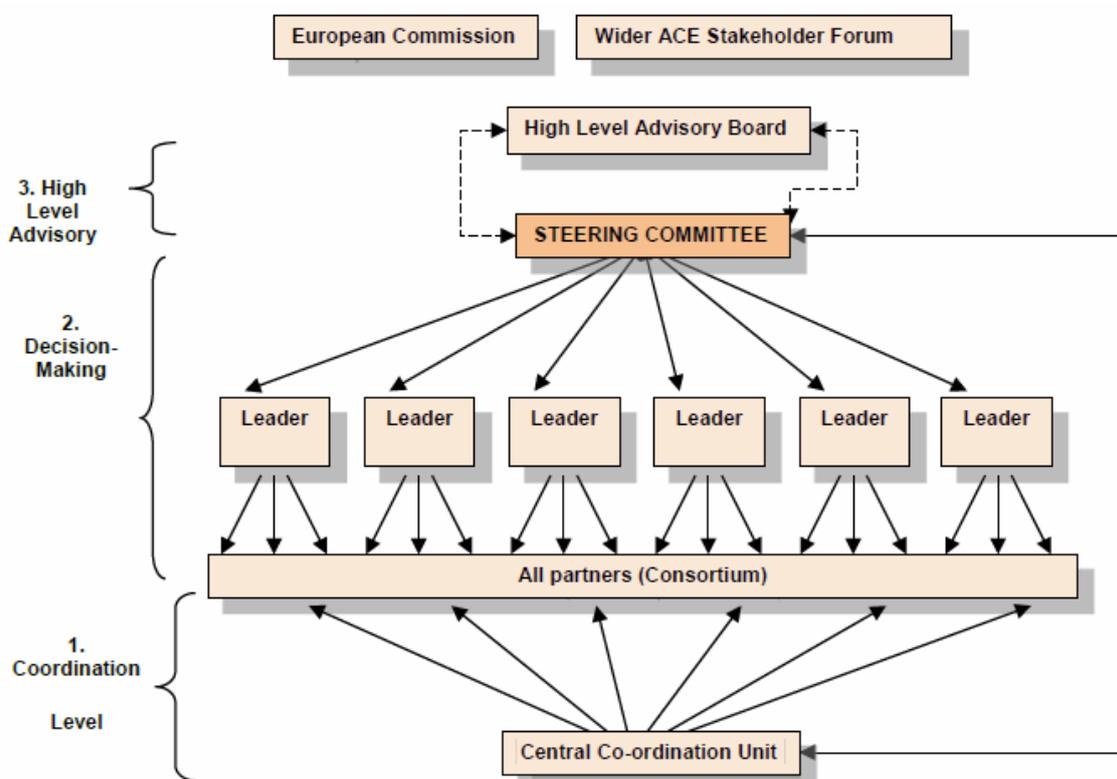


Figure 1 - ACE Project Organisational Structure

Central Coordination Unit

The provision of the ACE programme requires the existence of a Central Coordination Unit, responsible for the overall management and coordination of the programme.

This unit shall consist of a highly experienced management team and shall put in place customized programme management tools to ensure an efficient and highly responsive management system, capable of dealing with complex programme communication and

activities. EBN, the association that has managed the EC-BIC Network since 1984, has the relevant experience and track record to efficiently take this role and provide such unit for the ACE pilot programme.

Besides being generally responsible for ensuring the most up to date programme management executing and for ensuring a professional management experience for all partners and stakeholders, the Central Coordination Unit is specifically responsible for the coordination tasks described in the Annex. In the case of the ACE pilot programme, these tasks correspond to the coordination tasks described in the ACE project.

ACE Partners

The ACE partners consist of leaders in internationalization and cross border venturing from incubators, accelerators, clusters, living labs and other networks throughout Europe. Each brings complementary strengths and skill sets and is committed to pool their knowledge and expertise in internationalization and opening up their existing facilities and support networks of investors and mentors to other ACE partners:

- The **incubators** of the ACE pilot programme are focused on innovative startups with internationalization potential, primarily in the ICT sector, and they have put in place strong mentoring and early stage investment networks to support these startups.
- **Clusters** have also been proven to boost innovation and competitiveness in their local regions usually exploiting relationships built on proximity and trust.
- **Accelerators** on the other hand are a relatively recent phenomenon but with promising early results in catalysing early stage company growth through financial support and mentoring. Thus, ACE programme aims to provide a network to enable accelerators to interact in an optimal way with other support mechanisms like incubators and clusters, to identify and support even more high growth companies.
- **Living labs** provide a real-life test and experimentation environment where users and producers co-create innovations. The potential of living labs to support internationalization and open up European markets to SMEs has successfully been proven in recent projects.

The ACE pilot programme consortium consists of 15 partners, including 12 incubators/ accelerators/ clusters as listed in Figure 1.

Table 1 - ACE pilot programme partners

ACE pilot programme partners	
Full Partner Name	Country
European Business and Innovation Centre Network (EBN)	Belgium
Sociedade Portuguesa de Inovação – Consultadoria Empresarial e Fomento da Inovação S.A. (SPI)	Portugal
European Network of Living Labs (ENoLL)	Belgium
Coventry University Enterprises Limited (CUE)	United Kingdom
JIC, Zajmove Sdruzeni Pravnickch Osob (JIC)	Czech Republic
Forum Virium Helsinki OY (FORUM VIRIUM)	Finland
Cap Digital Paris Region (CAP DIGITAL)	France
Wayra Deutschland (Wayra)	Germany
Dublin Business Innovation Center Limited (Dublin BIC)	Ireland
Meta Group S.R.L (Meta Group)	Italy
Technoport SA (Technoport)	Luxembourg
Instituto Pedro Nunes, Associação para a Inovação e Desenvolvimento em Ciência e Tecnologia (IPN)	Portugal
Lunds Universitet (Cluster 55)	Sweden
Ionad Forbartha Gnó Teoranta (WESTBIC)	Ireland
iMinds VZW (iMinds)	Belgium

The ACE partners are responsible for providing a range of services and facilities to support the growth and internationalization of SMEs. These include the following:

- **High growth accelerator programmes** knowledge and experience
- **Incubation facilities** such as startup coaching/mentoring / incubation space
- **Established ICT Clusters** expertise
- **Internationalization support** to assist client companies in internationalization.
- **Cross border venturing** to assist client companies in early stage growth financing.

A detailed list of resources to be provided by the ACE partners is presented in section 2.4. Each incubator/accelerator/cluster shall be responsible for selecting mentors which will be part of the support internationalization teams. Responsibilities are specified in the “Guidelines for International Support Teams” document, developed under WP1 and sent to all consortium members. All partners of the programme are represented at consortium meetings to be informed of overall programme progress against objectives. This description can form the basis to understand the responsibilities that new associate partners may have during project expansion phase.

The Steering Committee

The Steering Committee is the main decision making body of the programme. The members of the Steering Committee are responsible for monitoring the programme execution and the evolution towards its scientific and technical objectives. On this ground, the Steering Committee makes decisions on the programme strategic orientations, future activities and budget allocations. These decisions take into account the input from consortium and High Level Advisory Board meetings. The Steering Committee shall be coordinated by a member of the Central Coordination Unit and be composed by representatives of the partners. In the case of the ACE pilot programme, the Steering Committee is composed of a representative of EBN, CUE, JIC, Technoport and SPI.

High Level Advisory Board (HLAB)

A HLAB was established from the outset of the ACE project to provide valuable and independent feedback and recommendations on the ACE programme strategy. A detailed description of the HLAB roles on the ACE programme as well as its contribution to the quality management is provided in section 2.8.

Wider stakeholder forum

Even though it is not a formal advisory body of ACE, the ACE stakeholder forum is also an important element of the programme organizational structure. These consist of:

- End-user communities (such as clusters, incubators, accelerators, ‘app’ communities);
- National agencies supporting SME internationalisation;
- Research institutes in particular those linked to living labs;
- Policy makers and funding bodies at regional and national level;
- European networks supporting the growth of ICT entrepreneurs, start-ups and SMEs;
- Policy makers at European and international level;
- General public in each participating region and in general.

Given the relevance of stakeholders’ views and involvement in the programme, an interactive communication mechanism was set up, providing voice to the stakeholder forum – ACE Social Platform (see section 2.5 Customer satisfaction).

Several organizations expressed interest in forming part of the wider ACE stakeholder forum since project inception. These organizations are listed in

Table 2. The ACE members are responsible for extending the ACE Wider Stakeholder Forum and expected to take into consideration their views and suggestions.

Table 2 - ACE Wider Stakeholder Forum

ACE Wider Stakeholder Forum	
Organizations who expressed interest in becoming part	
1.	European Business Angel Network (EBAN)
2.	Eurada - Association of Regional Development Agencies
3.	The International Network for Small and Medium Sized Enterprises-INSME
4.	Invest in Finland
5.	Italian Business Angel Network (IBAN)
6.	Dublin Seed Capital General Partnership Ltd (AIB Seed Capital Fund Ireland)
7.	Halo Business Angel Partnership (Ireland)
8.	Czech Invest
9.	Soft Landing Sweden (managed by Media Evolution)
10.	Microsoft Czech Republic
11.	Czech ICT Alliance
12.	International Technology Transfer Centre (China)
13.	Mediagroep International bvba (business angel support Belgium)
14.	Seed4Start European project (coordinated by Business Initiative Lux)
15.	Agoria (Belgium's largest employers organisation representing 1600 companies in technology industry)
16.	AICEP (Government Trade & Investment Agency of Portugal)
17.	UK Trade and Investment
18.	Association of Living Labs in Southern Africa (Llisa)

European Commission level

The ACE pilot programme is funded by the EC Seventh Framework Programme and aims to make an important contribution at EC policy level. For this reason, the EC level is another crucial level of the organizational structure of the programme. The Central Coordination Unit of ACE is expected to meet at least once per year with the Scientific Project Officer at the Commission to inform him/her briefly on project outcomes and future strategic objectives. The EC will also be invited to present EC policy on supporting SME growth through innovation and internationalisation at relevant ACE dissemination events, in particular the initial ACE cooperation summit and the final high level dissemination event.

2.2 Data management

This section refers to the **management of knowledge and intellectual property** in the ACE programme and aims to outline the principles and considerations regarding any potential data protection issues. As the ACE project is a Coordination and Support Action (CSA) which does not involve any research or technology development activities, the generation of substantial new IP is not expected over the duration of the project. For the purposes of policy development and the further promotion of innovation, the European Community will be given a non-exclusive royalty-free license to use the public knowledge generated in the project.

Confidential information relating to individuals or to the companies which apply to the ACE programme will be collected and protected **in strict accordance with EU and national regulations and best practice regarding data confidentiality**. Data from companies registering in the ACE programme will be collected through the **f6s platform**. f6s is a community of the best Startup founders with over 200,000 founders, the top Accelerators, 3,700+ startup organizations and 1,000 companies with deals. This is a safe platform used by thousands of stakeholders. The ACE partners agree to maintain confidential information about the companies, and use it only for selection purposes. Thus, companies' data will not be shared outside the ACE consortium.

In addition, partners giving direct support to companies will ensure the confidentiality of data shared by them, both in the implementation and follow up phases of the programme. Furthermore, having leading incubators, clusters and accelerators as partners of the ACE programme is an additional guarantee that the mentors working with companies will adopt the **best practices in terms of intellectual property management** and will certainly support the entrepreneurs on this matter. Indeed, the ACE partners are qualified to advise SMEs and startups on knowledge management and its importance during the internationalization process of the business.

The **ACE Social Platform, powered by Jive** – an online communication and collaboration platform, will allow for a direct contact between entrepreneurs (both successful and non-successful applicants), investors and mentors. The Central Coordination Unit and in general all partners of the ACE programme will broadly supervise the information flow occurring in the platform, in the benefit of the network. Moreover, companies will be free to decide upon the information they wish to share with the ACE community.

It is important to stress out that the project partners have also gained significant experience in managing knowledge in previous and on-going FP7 projects and are used to the respective EU legislation. Nevertheless, the consortium will ask the FP7 IPR Helpdesk for advice anytime there are doubts about IPR and patenting.

2.3 Processes of implementing the ACE programme

It is the partners' belief that results of the ACE programme can be achieved more efficiently if activities are managed as processes. With a systematic definition of activities and clearly established responsibilities, it is easier to install accountability and to produce improved and predictable results. Therefore, a 10 step process diagram was developed for the ACE programme (see Figure 2), identifying the main steps required for implementing the ACE programme and illustrating their interdependencies.

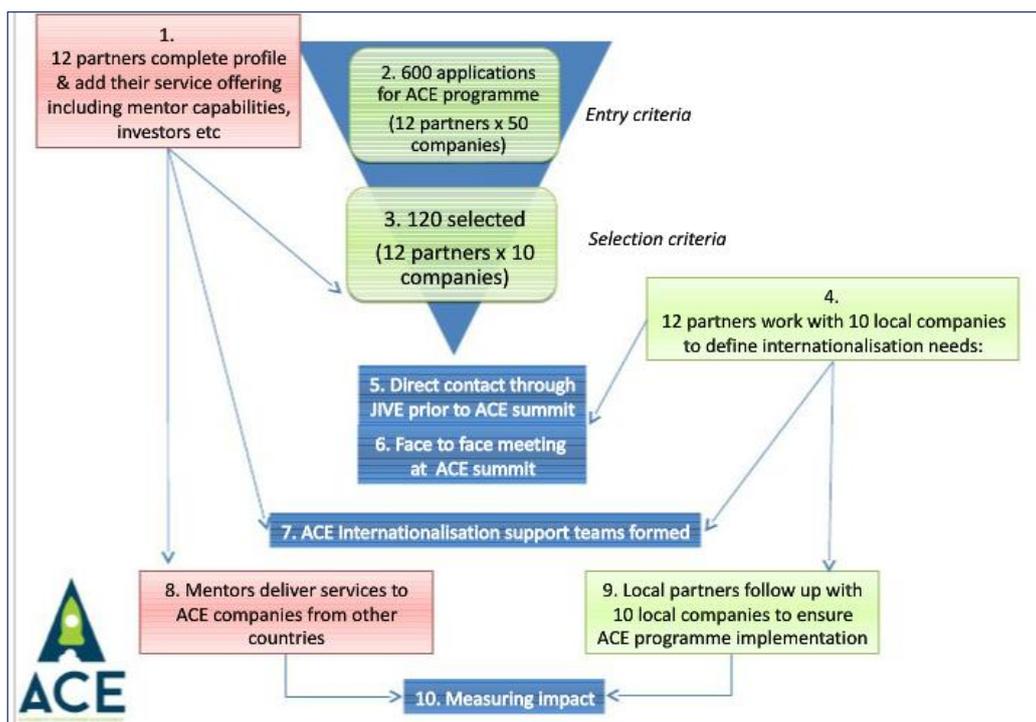


Figure 2 - ACE 10 step process

For a better comprehension of the processes at an individual partner and overall consortium level, a description of the processes involved in such steps, including their outcomes and the means of verification, is presented in the following tables. As such, the ACE partners and new associate partners can fully understand the alignment and interrelation of the key processes of the programme, as well as their individual roles and responsibilities.

1	Process	
	Selection of ACE partners and programme design	
	Outcome	Means of validation
	12 partners complete profile & add their service offering, including mentor capabilities, investors, etc.	Central Coordination Unit verifies and validates the profiles of the partners.

2

Process	
<p>Launch of ACE call for candidates Call involves a coordinated communication campaign across Europe to raise awareness about the ACE programme and to encourage applications from suitable candidates companies fill in an application form available online at f6s platform.</p>	
Outcome	Means of validation
600 applications for ACE programme (12 partners x 50 companies)	The Central Coordination Unit monitors the number and quality of applications received until the deadline, asking the partners for more dissemination efforts if needed.

3

Process	
<p>Selection of companies for the ACE programme ACE local partners make an assessment of the applications received and evaluate and select the companies. Companies shortlisted on the basis of the previous process will be invited to an interview. A clear evaluation criteria will be used to score and select candidates.</p>	
Outcome	Means of validation
120 selected (12 partners x 10 companies)	Selection of companies at partner level and the Central Coordination Unit supervises the process. Independent advice from HLAB on the selection of final candidates.

4

Process	
<p>Definition of companies internationalisation needs Each company selected is assigned a lead mentor from the partner organisation in their own country which will develop an individual internationalisation action plan with them. Therefore, 12 local partners work with 10 local companies providing a detailed analysis of company's business and an understanding of their current internationalisation strategy.</p>	
Outcome	Means of validation
A detailed list of cooperation requests from other partners, investment pitch, online company presentation and requests for cooperation/funding.	Validation at partner level with the supervision of the Central Coordination Unit. Each company also completes a standard survey on internationalisation levels and potential at this stage as part of the impact assessment (see annex).

5

Process	
<p>Contact through ACE Social Platform (JIVE) Prior to the ACE Cooperation Summit, a direct contact between companies and mentors through JIVE is performed, in order to fast pace the internationalisation activities of the companies and prepare the summit.</p>	
Outcome	Means of validation
ACE Cooperation Summit	ACE mentors supervise activity on communication and collaborative tools. Individual internationalisation action plan put in place for each partner with clearly defined actions and expected outcomes.

6

Process	
ACE Cooperation Summit All 120 companies and ACE partners participate in the cooperation meeting and direct contact between investors and companies is encouraged and followed up.	
Outcome	Means of validation
Early exposure to international partners and investors	Supervision of the activities by all partners and ACE local mentors.

7

Process	
Formation of ACE internationalisation teams International support teams will be put in place to achieve defined business cases & goals.	
Outcome	Means of validation
International support teams established for 120 companies (ACE mentors, ACE partners and companies)	Midterm review of programme's progress towards achievements of companies' goals. Independent engagement of HLAB in the evaluation of midterm results.

8

Process	
Services of ACE mentors to companies from other countries ACE mentors will deliver services to ACE companies from other countries, according to companies internationalisation needs and requests.	
Outcome	Means of validation
Companies implement their internationalisation strategy and expand to new markets.	ACE partners report to the Central Coordination Unit on the progress of support given to companies. Impact measurement tools and questionnaires to be applied directly to companies (see annex for draft templates).

9

Process	
ACE programme follow up Local partners follow up with 10 local companies to ensure ACE programme implementation.	
Outcome	Means of validation
Access to investors through a cross border venturing scheme. Identification of relevant H2020 RTD opportunities.	At the end of the process, the local ACE mentor is responsible for checking the strategic coherence of the programme being offered to each company and validating it together with the entrepreneur.

10

Process	
Measure impact Analysis of programme impact on companies. Implementation of QMS to underpin expansion strategy thus ensuring expansion does not negatively impact on quality of services offered.	
Outcome	Means of validation
Accession of new partners to ACE network. Extend the ACE network to other incubator/ accelerator/ cluster organisations.	Impact measurement tools and online questionnaires to evaluate the aggregate impact of ACE programme, its framework and impact at individual level. HLAB validates the ACE sustainability and expansion plan and provides recommendations on future strategy.

2.4 Resources

This section aims to detail the **resources** required to implement the ACE programme at individual partner and overall consortium level. The ACE partners have been selected given their capacity to offer certain resources (human resources, knowledge, time, facilities, services, etc) in support of ICT startups and SMEs.

ACE resources - facilities/support services

The ACE programme requires that partners - incubators, accelerators, living labs and clusters - make available and/or provide easy access to facilities, specific services and mentoring support, including the following:

- Office space
- Meeting rooms
- Help with raising bank finance, grants, venture capital
- Market research, sales and marketing support
- Access to potential clients
- Access to potential technology partners
- Access to potential distributors
- Accounting, legal and other related services
- Advice on recruitment of staff and personnel management
- Mentoring by industry experts or senior advisers
- Training to develop business skills
- Living lab validation
- Networking events

It is foreseen that the ACE pilot programme offers an average of 10 x half day mentoring session to each of the 120 companies engaged. However, each company will have an individual internationalization support programme, tailored for its needs. The international support teams will customize each support programme and companies will be able to select the services they wish to benefit from.

It is expected that some companies will require more mentoring than others and that different services are acquired according to each business needs. Thus, the ACE programme is expected to be both flexible and comprehensive in terms of resources.

Resources required for the smooth implementation of the ACE programme do not limit to the elements presented above, but also include **sources of funding**. The ACE pilot programme is co-funded by the European Commission Seventh Framework Programme. The services offered to companies shall be funded to a maximum of 75%. It is agreed that candidate companies may be supported through existing national support programmes at the same time as the ACE programme (so as to support the expenses related to trade fairs and travel costs, for instance).

To facilitate this process, ACE partners have engaged from an early stage with existing agencies and support programmes. In this way, ACE will also be able to complement existing support measures and programmes. Companies can also use their own financial resources to have access to the services provided in the ACE programme. Indeed, willingness to pay for ACE services is also included in the criteria to take part in the programme.

A **sustainability and expansion action plan** for the ACE programme will be developed, not only to maintain the cooperation mechanism between the current ACE partners, but also to expand the programme to new associate partners. The sustainability and expansion strategy will pave the way for ongoing funding of the ACE programme at individual partner level, during and after the project end. It will also focus on identifying additional funding options for the expansion of the programme.

2.5 Customer satisfaction

The success of the ACE programme depends on its end-users and other customers. Therefore, the ACE partners should understand the ACE customers' needs in order to meet their requirements and expectations. Giving attention to the customers' relationship with the programme and ensuring that their satisfaction is a priority also contributes to foster the expansion of the programme to new associate partners and continue to raise interest of the solutions provided among the target users: ICT startups and SMEs with a potential to grow internationally.

Although the start-ups involved in the ACE programme may be the final end-user, customers include other stakeholders who have invested in the process such as local development funding agencies and international development agencies (section 2.1). The following actions contribute to ensure customer satisfaction throughout the programme:

- The ACE programme has been designed in a way clearly differentiated from existing offerings with a distinct added value to its end-users. The design of such high value programme was facilitated by a mapping exercise of the existing support measures for internationalisation in Europe.
- The ACE pilot programme is delivered by leaders in startup creation, growth and internationalisation, ranging from incubators and accelerators to clusters and living labs. Experienced individual practitioners and mentors from these organisations can provide the needed knowledge and expertise to support ICT businesses fine-tuning their internationalization strategies, thus contributing to their overall satisfaction.
- Local partners and mentors of the international support teams will work closely with companies on their internationalization strategies and activities, thus being able to perceive their satisfaction towards the programme.
- The other stakeholder communities will be consulted at different stages of development through direct contact at local level and through an online stakeholder communication and interaction forum – ACE Social Platform, described in the box below.
- The views of the funding providers will also be taken into account. The ACE pilot programme will also benefit from a close contact with the European Commission and respective Project Officer.
- The involvement of the HLAB, with representatives of different end-user groups and stakeholders (see section 2.8), also aims to ensure the relevance of the programme approach to its end-users.
- The feedback and suggestions received from ACE customers will be analysed and taken into consideration throughout the project and in particular at ACE project meetings.

Tool – ACE Social Platform

The **ACE Social Platform** (Figure 3) is an online innovation support platform powered by JIVE, created for the benefit of the ACE online community. The ACE Social Platform facilitates the direct connection between members of the ACE community – investors, mentors and ICT startups from across Europe. Through the dynamics and usage of the platform, ACE partners will be able to understand the satisfaction of customers, in particular startups enrolled in the programme and non-successful applicants.

Among other functions, this tool allows for polls to be launched among participants, facilitating the understanding of the stakeholders' views on the programme. Their feedback will also be gathered by launching and promoting discussions at different stages of development of the ACE programme.

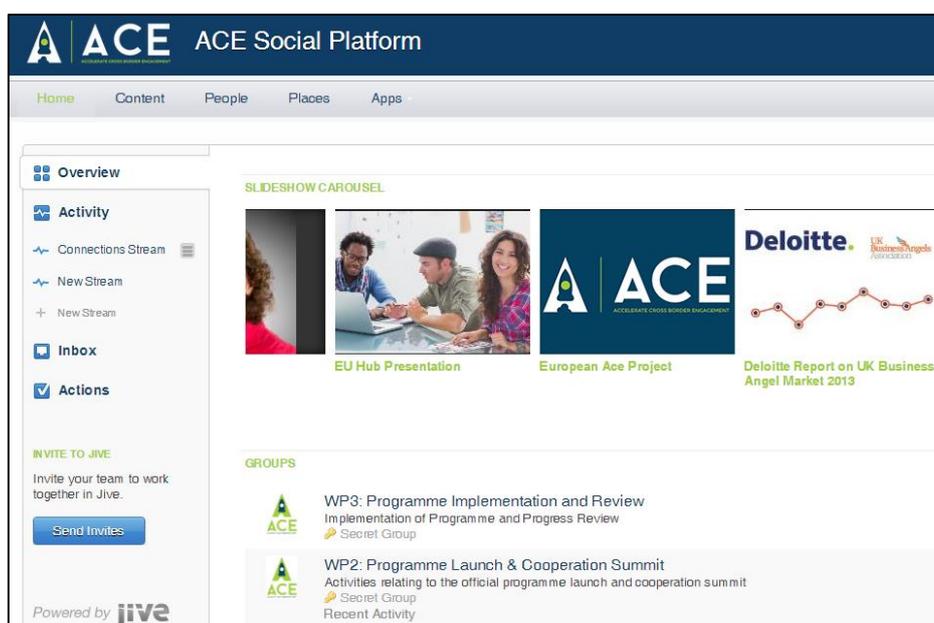


Figure 3 - ACE Social Platform Print Screen

2.6 Continuous improvement

The continuous improvement of the ACE programme should be a permanent objective of the ACE partners. Applying such approach allows for the programme activities to be continuously improved in the benefit of its end-users and other stakeholders and for the ACE partners' performance to be targeted at their needs.

Tool – Partners' Feedback Mechanism

Before each steering committee meeting and in particular at the midterm review meeting, an iterative feedback mechanism consisting of a simple individual questionnaire will be shared among partners, to understand their views on the following aspects:

- Alignment and satisfaction with programme progress and outcomes;
- Difficulties in conducting programme activities and potential solutions;
- Possible changes to methods and processes currently adopted - elements which need/could be enhanced for a more efficient delivery of the programme;
- Additional methods and tools which could improve ACE performance.

The results of the questionnaire will be presented at the meeting and be the basis for a group discussion regarding the opportunities for programme improvement. A sample questionnaire is provided in the Annex.

With such iterative feedback mechanism, the ACE programme has the needed flexibility to react to opportunities for improvement and to constantly align its activities with the programme's objectives and strategic intent. Furthermore, by implementing this mechanism the ACE programme ensures to be on top of its capabilities and to be able to offer up to date professional acceleration services to ICT companies.

2.7 Quality of results – impact measurement tools

The quality of results of the ACE programme will be measured in terms of the impact of the programme on end-users. In order to clearly measure this impact, the ACE Quality Management System provides credible **Impact Measurement Tools** which take into consideration the following aspects:

- The **goal** of the ACE programme is to deliver cross border services to highly innovative entrepreneurs, start-ups and SMEs in the ICT sector in order to accelerate their growth.
- The **expected impact** consists in more intense cross border cooperation for improved support to highly innovate SME and entrepreneurs.

Before developing such tools, the ACE partners have discussed what it is relevant to measure on the ACE programme. It was agreed that 3 different levels deserve attention in terms of impact measurement:

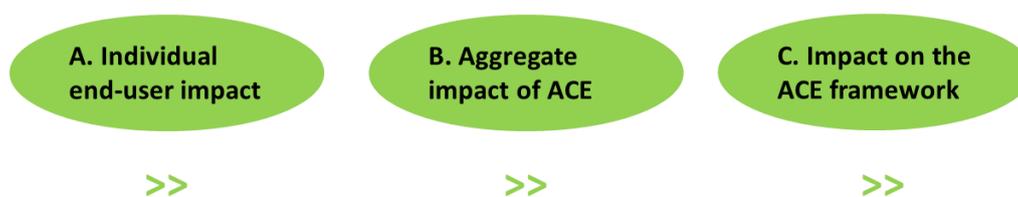


Figure 4 - Impact Measurement Levels

The following is a description of each level, justifying its importance and providing examples of aspects which will be measured.

A. Individual end-user impact

The main level to be addressed consists of the individual impact of the programme on its end-users: innovative start-ups and high potential SMEs, operating on the ICT sector, which enrol in the ACE programme.

Before enrolling in the programme, startups and SMEs are evaluated on a two stage process according to the “Company Selection Criteria”, as detailed in D1.1 – ACE Programme Design:

- i. Innovativeness
- ii. International growth potential
- iii. Internal resources and motivation

After selection and once companies are officially participants of ACE, it becomes relevant to measure the impact of the programme on the performance of their business. Below is a description of the impact measurement tool adopted.

Impact Measurement Tool – Individual end-user impact

This impact will focus on the support received to the internationalization process and will be measured in terms of self-rated impacts and in terms of specific outcomes.

Self-rated impacts - In general terms, these correspond to what each company thinks of ACE. Aspects to be measured include:

- Satisfaction with the programme
- Capacity to explore new markets and win new clients
- Investment readiness preparation/level

Specific outcomes - These correspond to specific data on the company performance and include the following aspects:

- Funding/investment raised
- New clients + new markets
- Growth (revenue/profits)
- Involvement in H2020 proposals
- Continued existence of company

Programme participants will be asked to fill in **simple online questionnaires** addressing the above mentioned issues. The questionnaires (templates provided in the Annex) will be completed at **three points**:

1. Prior to ACE programme implementation on company selection (M8) – as an initial assessment/diagnosis
2. Immediately after ACE programme completion – 6 month accelerator programme (M14-15)
3. At programme end (M24) – to assess which measures have an immediate impact and which take longer to show results

The link for filling in the questionnaires will be sent through email to all programme participants, who will be given a deadline for completion. To facilitate data collection, local ACE partners will be responsible for following up with the companies who have not responded. The results of the 3 questionnaires will feed into D4.2 – Midterm evaluation of results (M15) & evaluation of results on project completion (M24)

B. Aggregate impact of ACE

Another level considered relevant to be measured corresponds to the aggregate impact of ACE. Particular attention will be given to the difficulty of measuring the aggregate impact given the variety of services to be provided.

Impact Measurement Tool – Aggregate impact of ACE

The ACE programme as a whole will be measured taking into account the aspects listed below (among others).

Information provided by the partners/JIVE:

- No. of applicants / Acceptance rate
- Mentoring hours/days
- Variety of services offered
- Engagement of non-successful applicants

Results of the individual questionnaires:

- Aggregate funding raised by companies (including exits)
- Aggregate company growth
- Aggregate existence of companies

ACE partners will be asked to register the services offered per company.

C. Impact on the ACE framework

The evaluation of outcome and results on project completion (M24) will also address the impact of the programme on the ACE framework, which includes not only the partners, the ICT startups, mentors and investors who have enrolled in the pilot programme, but also the new associate partners and wider stakeholder communities.

Impact Measurement Tool – Impact on the ACE framework

The impact of the programme on the ACE framework as a whole will be measured at the end of the pilot programme. The assessment will address the following actors and aspects:

ACE partners – self-rated impact by the accelerators/incubators:

- Quality of companies
- Expansion of network

New associate partners – no., geographical spread, variety of services

Wider range of stakeholders – including local development funding agencies, international development agencies. Customer satisfaction will be measured throughout the project, through direct contact at local level and through the JIVE platform (see section 2.5 Customer Satisfaction). Representatives of the stakeholder communities may be consulted at an individual level.

The measurement of this impact will play an important role in the expansion of the ACE programme.

2.8 Transparency and independent audit: external HLAB

Selection and establishment of the HLAB

An external High Level Advisory Board (HLAB) was established at the outset of the project (WP6), with the objective of providing transparent and independent guidance on the ACE development process, implementation, results and sustainability.

The selection of HLAB members aimed at forming a group of cross-section representatives from principal end-users (successful international SMEs in ICT sector), potential groups of incubator/accelerator/cluster partners and other important stakeholders, including for example influential European investor networks or representative organisations. By constituting an independent body of opinion leaders in their respective field, the project benefits from a valuable external and impartial sounding board, providing feedback and suggestions on the strategy of the project and ensuring the relevance of the project approach to its end users.

The ACE pilot programme HLAB consists of the members presented in Table 3 (an extended version of this table, with a short description of each HLAB member, is demonstrated in the Annex).

Table 3 - ACE HLAB

ACE High Level Advisory Board	
Member	Position and Organization
Didier Moret	Managing Partner, iSource International
Cliff Reeves	General Manager, Emerging Business Team Microsoft Corporation
Jim Ward	Registrar and Deputy President, NUI Galway and former UNESCO advisor on international trade
Paolo Anselmo	President, IBAN and INSME
Ricardo Marvão	Co-founder and Board Member, Beta-i

Roles of the HLAB

The HLAB was established to provide expertise and support the ACE partners and Steering Committee throughout the project, in what regards the ACE programme design, positioning, strategic and operational planning. The specific roles of the HLAB include:

- Providing input on the mapping exercise conducted in WP1;
- Providing advice on the final format and design of the programme;
- Evaluating the project strategy, milestones and achievements;

- Supporting the final selection of ACE candidates, providing independent advice;
- Contributing to the project's midterm review;
- Validating the correct implementation of the ACE Quality Management System;
- Assisting the dissemination of ACE project results at a strategic level;
- Providing recommendations on future strategy and planning, including the validation of the ACE sustainability and expansion plan.

The HLAB will convene at critical stages of the project development. Table 4 foresees the physical and virtual meetings held/to be held between the ACE HLAB and the Steering Committee throughout the project's lifetime.

Table 4 - ACE HLAB Meetings

ACE HLAB Meetings		
Meetings	Month	Purpose
Kick-off meeting	M3	The first meeting of the Advisory Board was held in parallel with the ACE kick-off meeting in Brussels (October, 2013), to coincide with the presentation of the results of Task 1.1 mapping of cross border support mechanisms and the design of the ACE framework.
Second meeting	M7/8	The second meeting will be organised to coincide with the final selection of ACE candidates.
Conference call	M15	A conference call meeting will be held in month 15 for the HLAB to contribute to the midterm project review.
Final meeting	M22-24	The final meeting of the HLAB will take place at the final project event.

The HLAB provides guidance to the ACE project, not only during the specific HLAB meetings, but also throughout the project, on consultation by the WP leaders and the Steering Committee. Communication between these parties is also facilitated through the ACE open innovation collaborative platform on JIVE. All recommendations by the HLAB will be discussed between project partners, in particular during consortium meetings.

It is important to note that the EC external review of the project will also contribute to an independent audit of progress. Indeed, the recommendations provided by the EC will be taken into account by the project partners.

ANNEXES

Table – ACE Central Coordination Unit responsibilities

Central Coordination Unit responsibilities	
Coordination tasks	Description
Technical coordination	<p>The technical coordination of the ACE programme shall be in line with the technical tasks for the ACE pilot programme which correspond to the ones described for the ACE project, as follows:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Chair meetings and propose decisions to be made on strategic orientations of the programme, allocation of resources and consortium management; • Monitor the achievements of programme’s overall objectives.
Legal and contractual issues	<p>In the case of the ACE pilot programme, these issues correspond to the legal and contractual aspects of the ACE project. The Central Coordination Unit shall be responsible for any legal and contractual issues in the ACE programme. These may include:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Prepare and establish a Consortium Agreement between all partners, which covers details aspects such as decision-making and reporting process; costs, budget and payment modalities including transfer of resources between partners; and knowledge management; • Deal with contractual issues with funding entities. In the case of the pilot programme, this corresponds to the Grant Agreement between the Consortium and the EC).
Financial issues	<p>The financial matters of the ACE programme include:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Act as the financial coordinator of the programme; • Provide appropriate monitoring tools and follow up with the partners to ensure accurate and timely financial reporting in line with the forecast budget of the programme; • Prepare the required periodic activity and management reports for the funding entity summarizing programme’s progress and reporting any deviations and correction actions put in place.
Partner communication and dispute resolution	<p>Communication among the Consortium partners include:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Organisation of regular meetings between the partners in order to track progress on the programme; • Ensure that programme conflicts are solved at the right level of responsibility according to the Consortium Agreement.
Risk management process and contingency plans	<p>Given the ambitious activities of the ACE programme, risk management and contingency planning is important to ensure the programme mission, implementation and outcomes, with budget remain on track. To this end a comprehensive risk management process shall be implemented over the duration of the programme. Members of the Consortium shall present an assessment of progress, and risks to progress, to the Steering Committee and propose contingency plans where necessary to address any specific identified risks, such as: operational risks; time risks; competence risks; budget risks; any risk to deliverable production, in line with the financial contract.</p>
Quality management	<p>The Central Coordination Unit shall coordinate the implementation of the Quality Management System designed during the ACE pilot programme.</p>

Table – Questionnaire to partners

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Tool – Partners’ Feedback Mechanism

[To be applied before each consortium meeting]

Name:

ACE partner name:

How do you assess the expectations/satisfaction of your local companies towards the programme? [10 responses] (1 – very unsatisfied; 5 – very satisfied)

Have you had any difficulties in conducting programme activities so far? (Yes/No)

Please provide details (optional):

Please suggest solutions for such difficulties (optional):

Do you have suggestions regarding possible changes to methods and processes currently adopted /elements which need/could be enhanced for a more efficient delivery of the programme? (Yes/No)

If yes, please detail:

Do you have suggestions regarding additional methods and tools which could improve ACE performance? (Yes/No)

If yes, please detail:

How satisfied are you with programme progress and outcomes to date? (1 – very unsatisfied; 5 – very satisfied)

Please provide details (optional):

What is your expectation towards the possibility of continuing the ACE programme after the project’s end? (1 – very low; 5 – very high)

Please provide details (optional):

Additional comments:

Table – Questionnaire to companies 1

Impact Measurement Tool – Individual end-user impact 1

[To be applied prior to ACE programme implementation on company selection (M8), with an explanation of the further 2 questionnaires to be applied after ACE programme completion (M15) and at programme end (M24)]

Name:

Company:

Local Partner:

International ACE Partners:

Self-rated impacts

From 1 (very low support) to 10 (very high support), what are your expectations towards the ACE programme in terms of support to the internationalization process of your business? _____

From 1 (very low results) to 10 (very high results), what are your expectations towards your involvement in the ACE programme in terms of desired results to your business? _____

From 1 (lowest) to 10 (highest), in which level do you think your business and your team are in terms of capacity to explore new markets and win new clients? _____

Are you seeking Investment Readiness preparation during the ACE programme? [Yes/No](#)

If Yes, from 1 (lowest) to 10 (highest), in which level do you think your business and your team are in terms of investment readiness? _____

Specific outcomes

When was your business created?

Has your business raised funding/investment so far? [Yes/No](#)

If yes, how much? _____

Are you looking for external funding for your business? [Yes/No](#)

If yes, how much? _____

Which of the following markets has your business been able to reach? [\[selection\]](#)

How many clients/users does your business have at your local market? _____

How many clients/users does your business have at international markets? _____

How many new clients/users do you wish to win in 12 months? _____

How many employees/team members do you have? _____

What is the current revenue of your business? _____

Open comments/suggestions [optional/providing multiple answers]

What do you expect from the programme? What do you think will be the advantages for your business?

What is the main difficulty/challenge you find in terms of the internationalization of your business?

Additional comments:

Table – Questionnaire to companies 2

Impact Measurement Tool – Individual end-user impact 2

[To be applied after ACE programme completion (M15) and to focus in part on the questions asked in questionnaire 1]

Name:

Company:

Local Partner:

International ACE Partners:

Self-rated impacts

[questions according to questionnaire 1, following up on previous results]

Specific outcomes

[questions according to questionnaire 1, following up on previous results, as well as additional questions to assess potential results after the ACE programme:]

Did you open a new office / subsidiary abroad? [Yes/No](#)

Have you been able to validate your offer and get insight on international markets? [Yes/No](#)

Have you acquired new technology partners? [Yes/No](#)

Have you acquired new commercial partners? [Yes/No](#)

Open comments/suggestions [optional/providing multiple answers]

[questions according to questionnaire 1]

Additional questions to be included

How would you rate the support given by your local partner? (1 – very weak; 5 – very good)

How would you rate the support given by your international mentors? (1 – very weak; 5 – very good)

Did you have access to all the services foreseen in your internationalization plan? [Yes/No](#)

If no, please give further details: _____

How would you rate the services you have had access to? (1 – very weak; 5 – very good)

How would you rate the ACE programme? (1 – very weak; 5 – very good)

What would you change/improve in the ACE programme?

Any other comments/suggestions?

Table – Questionnaire to companies 3

Impact Measurement Tool – Individual end-user impact 3

[To be applied at the end of the programme (M24)]

Name:

Company:

Local Partner:

International ACE Partners:

[questions according to questionnaires 1 and 2, following up on previous results]

Table – ACE HLAB

ACE High Level Advisory Board	
Member	Position and Organization
Didier Moret	Managing Partner, iSource International and Chair, ACE HLAB
	<p>Since 1998 iSource has been a leading French venture capital firm specializing in early stage investments. iSource currently manages 10 funds totalling €185 million and in December 2012 they took on the management of the new €30 million AngelSource fund supported by the French Angel network. To maximise investments, iSource is primarily interested in innovations that meet global needs, thus capable of turning initial start-up ideas into «Small Globals» companies that aim to play a leading role on the market at a global level. Over the last few years, iSource have invested considerably in equipping companies with this extra global «reach» aspect and they will bring this experience to bear in the ACE project.</p> <p>Didier Moret has been involved over twenty five years in entrepreneurial financing of the creation and development of global emerging technology companies, in particular in the industrial spaces of Information Technology and Renewable Energies. In his capacity as Chair of the HLAB and through his personal connections, Didier Moret will lead a dissemination effort targeting the involvement of corporate VC incubators in the ACE project. The objective of this campaign is to engage additional companies, investors and potential mentors in the ACE process.</p>
Cliff Reeves	General Manager, Emerging Business Team Microsoft Corporation
	<p>The Emerging Business Team leads Microsoft’s work with the startup entrepreneur and investor community and Cliff is at the top level of management in Microsoft. Microsoft has a close collaborative relationship with JIC, the ACE partner in the Czech Republic, and they are strong supporters of their StarCube Accelerator profile.</p> <p>Cliff started his more than 30 year career in the software industry with IBM. He has held a wide range of software product-development roles in the areas of database, application development, and communication and messaging systems. He was vice president of product management at Lotus Development Corp, and was closely involved with IBM’s acquisition of Lotus in 1995.</p>
Jim Ward	Registrar and Deputy President, NUI Galway and former UNESCO advisor on international trade
	<p>Jim Ward became the first member of the Department of Marketing, when he took up the Bank of Ireland Chair in Marketing in 1980. Since this time he has lead the growth of the Department, to a staff of seven full-time academic staff. He taught at California State University, Hayward before joining University College Galway in 1973 as a Statutory Lecturer in Business Studies. He held the position of Dean of the Commerce Faculty before taking up his present position of Professor of Marketing when the Department was formed in 1980. Dr. Jim Ward has initiated a number of University / Industrial programmes with significant external funding. These include EU funded projects on strategic planning and numerous research projects for local and national organisations both private and State sector. As a consultant he has extensive participation in EU TACIS and PHARE programmes in Estonia, Czech Republic, Tajikistan and Russia.</p>
Paolo Anselmo	President, IBAN and INSME
	<p>Paolo Anselmo currently acts as President of IBAN Association and as advisor of regional and local authorities for regional development and innovation related measures and actions, both in Italy and Europe. Paolo is also the President of INSME (International Network for Small and Medium Sized Enterprises (SMEs)) and he sits in the EBAN’s (European Business Angel Network) and WBAA’s (World Business Angel Association) Board of Directors. Since 1991 he is serving the board of several innovative start-ups and international Association.</p> <p>Paolo has a background as engineer and a wide experience in working with multinational teams and cultures around Europe. He has more than 15 years of experience-based knowledge in regional policy development, innovation strategies and measures and access to finance gained by the participation</p>

Ricardo Marvão	Co-founder and Board Member, Beta-i
	Ricardo Marvão co-founded and was the CEO of Evolve, one of the first Portuguese startups providing services for the major European space agencies, that was later acquired by Novabase (the biggest Portuguese IT company). A fire starter, evangelist and globetrotter, he is part of the Strategic Task Force of 'Silicon Valley comes to Lisbon 2012'. Ricardo is a board member of the Beta-i Accelerator which is taking a leading role in bringing together accelerators from across Europe to network and exchange knowledge. Beta-i and EBN are in direct contact outside of the framework of this proposal to discuss ways in which accelerators and incubators can optimise cooperation to improve the investment and growth prospects of innovative SMEs.