

Skills 4Retail
Building sustainable growth

Long-term Sustainability Strategy

Deliverable 6.1

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Skills4Retail
Building sustainable growth

Table of Contents

About the Skills4Retail project 5

The Skills4Retail Consortium 6

Document Control Information 8

Document history 9

Introduction 10

What are the goals of Sustainability Strategy? 10

What is in this document? 10

How does Sustainability Strategy connect to other WPs? 11

Social Business Model 13

Funding Strategy 15

What are our options to achieve financial sustainability? 15

What are our preferences on funding options? 17

How do we expect the funding mix to evolve? 18

What are our open questions on funding? 20

Partnership Strategy 22

What partners segments will we prioritise and why? 22

What are our priorities when expanding the partnership? 23

How might we gradually formalise the partnership? 23

What are our propositions for each key partner segment? 24

What is our approach to partnership management? 25

What is S4R Governance today and what changes are needed? 27

What ownership model might be suitable for a Secretariat? 27

What are our open questions on partnership and governance? 29

Certification Strategy 30

Ensuring the sustainability via certification in “Skills4Retail” project, where to go? What is planned and realistic to achieve by September 2027? 30
The Approach: Accreditation vs. Certification 31
Integration of micro-credentials in certification: Yes, if possible! 32
A “hybrid model”: to consider? 32
How to obtain certification? (by September 2027) 33
Skills4Retail Certification workshop: summary and outcomes 35
General conclusion and follow-up 36
Implementation plan 38
Assumptions and Dependencies 41
Risks and Mitigations 41
Adaptive learning and continuous improvement 43
Dissemination 44
What are our goals for dissemination? 44
How will we disseminate the Sustainability Strategy? 44
Annexes 46
Annex: Lessons from other Blueprints 47
Lucia Grilli on GreenSkills4Hydrogen and FemmeForward 47
David Fitzgerald on ARISA and ESSA 49
Interpretation and conclusions from the interviews conducted 51
Annex: Funding and market research: Interpretation 57
Quality assurance review 60

About the Skills4Retail project

The Skills4Retail project focuses on fast-tracking the 'Triple Transition' of Digital, Green and Resilience in the Retail sector, helping retailers to embrace ecommerce and ensuring their new business models are sustainable from the start. The project's goal is to design a new Retail Skills Strategy and VET Training Programme that will address the urgent and emerging skills needs of retailers in the key areas of Digital, Green and Resilience. It will focus on training fresh new talent for the sector through training programmes in VET Schools, Institutes and Higher Education Institutions, and the reskilling of the existing workforce via work-based learning and short-term modular courses.

Note: Skills4Retail will focus on all sizes of retailers, across all categories and all parts of the value chain.

The Skills4Retail Consortium

The Skills4Retail consortium is an Erasmus + Partnerships for Innovation Funded project, bringing together 30 partners.

1	Partner	Acronym	Country
2	Junior Achievement-Young Enterprise Latvija	JA-YE Latvia	Latvia
3	Profesionalas Izglitibas Kompetences Centram Rigas Valsts Tehnikums	RSTS	Latvia
4	Matrix Internet Applications Limited	Matrix Internet	Ireland
5	Karlínská obchodní akademie	Karlínská	Czechia
6	Schuman Associates SCRL	Schuman	Belgium
7	Junior Achievement Austria – Unternehmerische Praxis- und Kompetenzbildung	JA Austria	Austria
8	Scoala Superioara Comerciala Nicolae Kretzulescu	SSCNK	Romania
9	Wirtschaftskammer Österreich	WKO	Austria
10	Universitatea din Bucuresti	UB	Romania
11	Digital Technology Skills Limited	DTSL	Ireland
12	Escola Profissional de Vila do Conde	EPVC, Vila do Conde	Portugal
13	Junior Achievement Magyarország Oktatási, Vállalkozásszervezési Alapítvány	JA Hungary	Hungary
14	Aprender a Empreender - Associação de Jovens Empreendedores de Portugal	JA Portugal	Portugal
15	Asociatia Junior Achievement of Romania	JA Romania	Romania
16	Skillnet Ireland Company Limited by Guarantee	Skillnet	Ireland
17	Vállalkozók és Munkáltatók Országos Szövetsége	VOSZ	Hungary
18	Szent Gyorgy Hang - Es Filmmuveszeti Technikum	SZGYF	Hungary
19	Junior Achievement, OPS	JA Czech	Czechia
20	Junior Achievement Young Enterprise Malta Foundation	JA Malta	Malta
21	Junior Achievement Young Enterprise Ireland	JA Ireland	Ireland
22	OTB Europe	OTB Europe	Portugal
23	Accenture SA	Accenture SA	Belgium

No	Associated Partner	Acronym	Country

1	Intel Technology Poland Spółka z ograniczoną odpowiedzialnością	INTEL Poland	Poland
2	JMH, SGPS, S.A.	JerónimoMartins	Portugal
3	EuroCommerce	EuroCommerce	Belgium
4	SPAR Österreichische Warenhandels AG	SPAR	Austria
5	Svaz obchodu a cestovního ruchu České republiky	SOCR CR	Czechia
6	Szegedi Tudományegyetem	USZ	Hungary
7	UNI Europa*	UNI Europa	Belgium

* joined as Associated Partner on Oct. 30th 2023

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Introduction

What are the goals of Sustainability Strategy?

The overarching goal of Sustainability Strategy (as the main deliverable of WP6) is to create and implement a strategy to sustain and grow the S4R Alliance sustainably beyond the initial grant period, considering four critical dimensions: partners, income, certification and country coverage.

By September 2027, we aim to demonstrate S4R is growing sustainably by:

1. Expanding the Alliance to 100+ **partners** representing 33 Erasmus+ **countries**
2. Generating enough **income** from recurring membership or service fees to cover our forecasts costs for service delivery and expansion beyond the initial grant period.[1]
3. Achieving **certification** at the EU level and in each of the 8 pilot countries.

What is in this document?

Reflecting the three goals above, our Long-Term Sustainability Strategy comprises five elements:

1. **Social Business Model** – how might we summarise what S4R is selling, to who and why?
2. **Funding Strategy –** how might we manage our costs and income?
3. **Partnership Strategy** – how might we onboard and manage partners?
4. **Certification Strategy** – how might we achieve certification?
5. **Implementation Plan** – how might we sequence and integrate our activities?

Please note:

- The Long-Term Sustainability Strategy will be updated on Month 24 and Month 36 each year as lessons are learned and will be reviewed internally by IAB and Consortium members. Another update will be conducted officially (with publishing the document) in Month 48 before the end of the current grant period. This document should be regarded as **a 'living document', which will evolve continually.** In each section, we have outlined our initial thinking on each topic, followed by open questions. These will become a focus for further investigation and guide the next strategy update.
- Our initial strategy consciously **does not cover operating model or business case** elements. There is no detailed organisation structure, process mapping or technical architecture in this version, nor any forecasts of cost and income under alternative scenarios. We believe it is

[1] We view sustainable funding as **recurring income that fully covers our forecast costs**. In a future strategy update, we will forecast costs and recurring membership or service fees to cover them. In the interim, we will consider making other grant applications as 'stepping stones' to sustainability if they might help us enter new countries, reduce costs and improve learning outcomes through innovation.

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more valuable to develop these elements later, when we have better refined the strategy in response to lessons learned.

How does Sustainability Strategy connect to other WPs?

WP6 had multiple interconnections with each of the other S4R WPs – for example:

- WP1 manages **planning and updates** across all WPs
- WP2 shares a **common implementation plan** with WP6, but focuses on distinct workstreams[2]
- There is a deep **inter-dependence with WP3 for certification**. WP6 will define the strategy for certification and WP3 will engage with local educational partners in each country and support them through the certification process
- The strategy defined by WP6 is **critically dependent on successful delivery of pilot training** courses, which will be defined and created by WP2, WP3 and WP4.
- Partnership and funding strategy for WP6 is also deeply connected to WP5, which is leading on **marketing and website** development that will enable propositions and partner engagement.

The diagram below shows the relationship between the six Work Packages (WPs) in S4R for context.

[2] Given the prevalence of deeply interrelated activities across Work Packages, we have created a single implementation plan, which is presented in D6.1 (this document) and in D2.2 (the European Retail Skills Strategy). In this document we focus on describing the partnership, income generation, grant application and certification workstreams. In D2.2 we focus on describing the training curriculum development and the pilot coordination workstreams. The intent is to ensure mutual alignment on high-level milestones and activities between stakeholders involved in all WPs and workstreams.

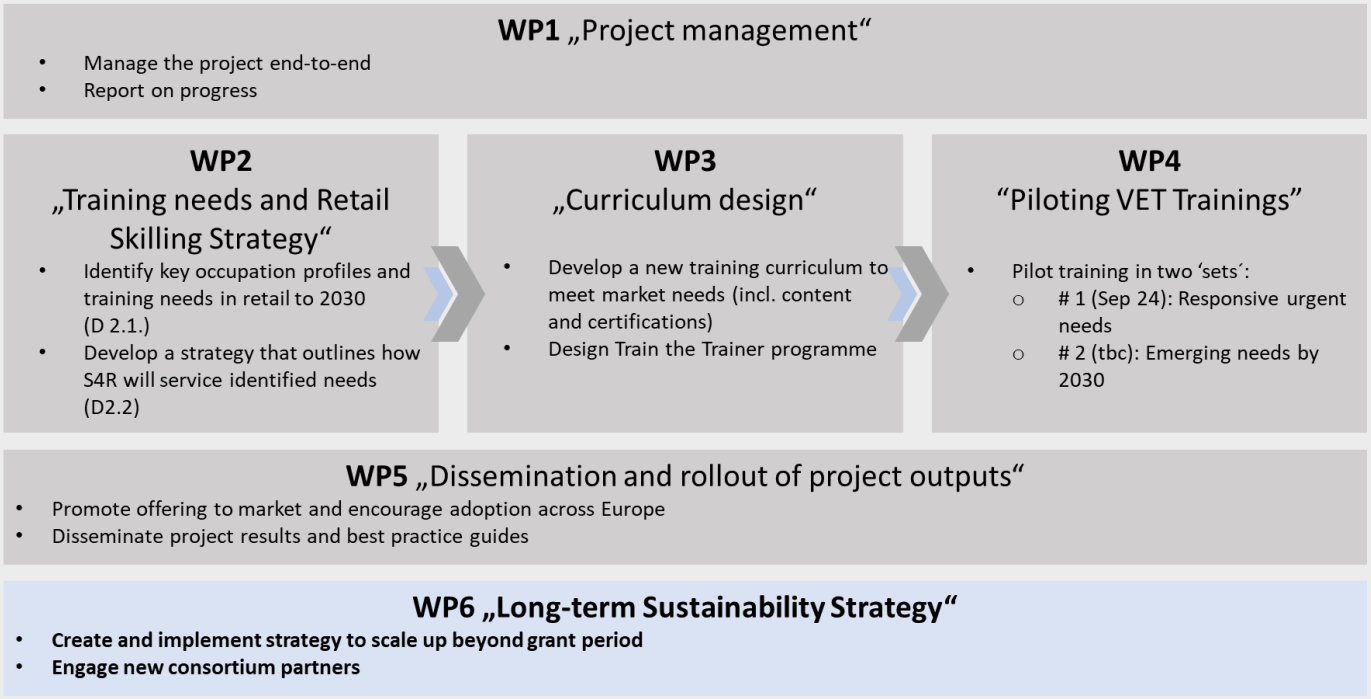


Figure 1. “Relationship between S4R Work Packages” (Source: Accenture)

Social Business Model

This section is intended to give the reader a simplified summary view of our initial thinking using an adapted version of the "Social Business Model Canvas" developed by the Social Innovation Lab (2013).

S4R Social Business Model Canvas (1/2)

Impact, outcomes & outputs

Mission - what problem(s) are we solving? S4R exists to:

1. Make jobs in retail more attractive to students and career switchers
2. Improve retention of existing retail staff
3. Grow sales for retailers (esp. online)
4. Cut retail energy bills, waste & emissions
5. Improve access to capital for retailers

Impact Measures - how do we know if we are succeeding?

- Measure scale via course completions and outputs via assessment scores
- Measure outcomes by comparing groups who get training to peers who do not – do more of them get jobs in retail, stay longer, grow online sales, cut waste etc.?

Inputs & activities

Activities - what will we do?

- Design and pilot the reactive and emerging training courses in 8 countries, then expand availability to 33 countries
- Regular refresh the needs analysis, curriculum and training materials
- Manage a train-the-trainer programme
- Support VET/HE institutes and others to deliver training online and in-person
- Manage a micro-credentials programme
- Support VET/HE institutes to engage with relevant national bodies for certification
- Note: this is not an exhaustive list

Resources - what do we need to deliver it?

- Funding for all effort needed until we generate significant membership and service fees
- Retail Learning & Development expertise and learner feedback to guide our design
- Training curriculum
- Offline and online training content
- Training space and equipment
- Website to engage partners and enable download of training in SCORM format
- Potentially later: learning platform(s) access to centralise all training courses
- Relationships with retailers, VET/HE institutes and public sector in 33 Erasmus+ countries and with 8 national certification bodies and one EU body

Financial model

Income Mix - how will we generate income?

- Temporary grants to accelerate innovation / expansion into countries
- Recurring annual tiered membership fees from retailers, VET/HE institutes, public ministries or agencies for training related services
- One-off service fees from retailers and VET/HE institutes

Cost Mix – where will we need to spend most?

- Staff salaries comprise most cost, e.g. curriculum mgmt., marketing, partner mgmt., pilot coordination
- Limited marketing budget (as S4R is not a B2C offer)
- Limited budget to create digital user experience or tech. systems (pending operating model design)

Surplus - how will we re-invest profits?

- Expanding S4R to more partners and countries
- Continuously improve initial set of courses
- Creating new courses
- Improve user experience and business model by integrating all courses in learning platform(s)

Figure 2. "S4R Social Business Model Canvas (1/2)" (Source: Accenture)

S4R Social Business Model Canvas (2/2)

Partners & competitors

Partners - who might give us inputs?
Tier 1: engage 1 of each x 33 countries...
- VET/HE institutes
- International / national retail networks
- Public ministries / skilling agencies

Tier 2 partners: engage as needed with...
- Retail associations, trade unions, ed tech / research / certification specialists etc.

Competitors - who might offer alternatives?
- Large retailers already have training – but our triple transition focus complements it
- VET/HE institutes have training – but most will lack best practice full suite for retail
- EdTech companies with learning platforms have training - but many students and retailers cannot access it

Beneficiaries - who is ultimately benefiting?
- Students and career switchers
- Existing retail staff (incl. frontline, supply chain and HQ staff, learning & dev. mgrs.)
- Owners of small and large retailers

Customers - who is paying us?
- Initial tiered membership fees and service fees will be aimed at: retailers, VET/HE institutes, public ministries or skilling agencies
- Explore charging fees to individuals later

Channels

Beneficiary channel – how will we reach individuals who are learners?
- Always engage with individuals via third party organisations to minimise cost and complexity (avoid creating a 'B2C' model)
- Engage students via VET/HEs
- Engage employees via retailers
- Explore options to engage both later via EdTech companies / learning platforms, public Ministries // skilling agencies etc.

Customer channel – how will we reach organisations who might pay member fees?
- Engage directly with retailers, VET/HE institutes etc. via S4R Alliance Partnership Manager and governance fora
- Convert a sub-set of existing and new Alliance members to paying fees for added benefits
- Anyone can download courses from S4R website in open-source format (SCORM) and deliver via their own platforms

Propositions

Social Value Proposition - what do our beneficiaries want?
- Mostly better access to existing training – i.e. translation, integration, protected time to learn, recognition of existing skills and incentives for further learning
- New training content needed in key areas
- Please see D2.1 for five themes and 20 - 30 specific training needs; and D2.2 for detail on personas and learning pathways

Customer Value Proposition -what will our customers pay for (initial model)?
- Pilot courses will stay free to download but new content, train the trainer support and / or certification may be monetised
- We will explore willingness to pay tiered annual member and service fees – e.g.:

1. Low fees (e.g. for SMEs): for train the trainer support to adopt courses
2. Medium fees (e.g. for VETs / public ministries or skilling agencies): for sales / marketing support to re-sell training
3. High fees (e.g. for large retailers / EdTech companies): for a 'seat at table' to shape the future offering and co-brand training

Figure 3. "S4R Social Business Model Canvas (2/2)" (Source: Accenture)

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Funding Strategy

What are our options to achieve financial sustainability?

We considered three main funding options[3] for S4R:

Options	Description	Advantages	Disadvantages	Lessons from Blueprints[4]
1. EU or national public grant funding	Pre-defined schedule of milestone payments for delivery of activities in response to specific Grant Funding Calls	• Multiple opportunities with significant value of funding available • Further grant funding may be a vital 'stepping stone' when membership and service fees cannot fully cover all forecast costs • Emerging ambitions outside the scope of the original Grant Agreement may fit funder priorities but will not be deliverable without other grants	• High competition and long procurement cycle • Need to invest intensive effort in early research, bid writing, negotiation and contracting, reporting etc. • Need to manage risk new priorities with multiple grants might add too much complexity or distract from market driven needs	• 5 Blueprints **(38%)** considered applying for further EU grants, e.g.: - Structural Funds - InvestEU - ESF+ - Horizon Europe+ - Just Transition Fund - Digital Europe - Erasmus+ • None of the Blueprints focused on applying for national level grants • Interviews of members of other blueprints have shown success in applying for further EU grants, as described in Appendix 1 (Lessons from other EU Blueprints). However, the success was corelated with support from the private sector.
2. Membership fees	Recurring regular (e.g. annual) lump sum payments from retailers, VET/HEs and / or public ministries or skilling bodies, with pricing tiers corresponding to additional training related services or benefits	• Viable revenue stream can be grown steadily and adjusted via pricing tiers • Many examples of Secretariats funded by members can be explored to compare their pricing and the benefits offered • Existing partners can help us understand willingness to pay • Will remain relatively simple to administer even if S4R expands to 100s of members	• We will likely need a suite of training courses that have been refined after pilots before we can generate substantial membership fees – so these fees may not scale up to cover costs till 2027+ • We would need to carefully consider the fair distribution of decision rights in governance bodies to take account of different fees paid	• 3 Blueprints **(23%)** considered charging membership fees • 2 **(15%)** focused on charging fees to Corporates • 1 **(7%)** focused on charging fees to VET/HE institutes • Interviews of members of other blueprints have shown limited success of membership fees, as shown in the interviews in Appendix 1 (Lessons from other EU Blueprints). We will investigate this further during the project.
3. Service fees	One-off payment for purchasing additional training related service or benefit (e.g. train the trainer support/marketing support)	• Viable revenue stream suitable for partners who are not ready to pay monthly/annual membership • Existing partners can help us understand willingness to pay	• Irregular, but can ramp up slowly • Can be charged only once the program has been developed and roll-out (2027-2028+)	• The success of individual training fees as a revenue model in the EU retail sector lacks comprehensive public information. For instance, Individual Learning Accounts (ILAs) in countries like France have facilitated

[3] We do not currently envisage S4R using any external financing (e.g. debt or equity).
[4] Based on reviewing the Sustainability Strategies of 13 EU Blueprints to compare their funding plans.

		• Will remain relatively simple to administer even if S4R expands to 100s of members	• Can be difficult to connect with decision rights in the governance bodies based on the services purchased	access to training by allowing workers to use accumulated funds for educational purposes, showing positive uptake and application. Despite these successes, challenges remain in scaling such models across diverse markets and ensuring consistent funding and support from both public and private sectors.
4. Individual training fees	Direct payments from learners for training and related services	• Potential to 'own the relationship' with the end user and cut out third parties • Greater opportunities for scaling up, upselling, cross-selling etc.	• Serving thousands of learners directly makes sales and marketing, billing, customer service, technical support etc. much more costly and complex	The prices for individual training fees in the retail sector within the European Union vary widely depending on the type of training and the provider, generally ranging from €50 to €500 per course. Examples include: Digital skills training in retail, often subsidized under EU-funded initiatives, typically costing around €100 to €300. Tailored supermarket training with various pricing models, from basic online modules at €50 to comprehensive classroom and management courses up to €500. Specialized leadership and operational training programs, requiring significant investment, often between €200 and €500. Entry-level retail training provided at no cost to participants, usually sponsored by foundations to equip youth with necessary skills.

Figure 3. "Comparison of funding options" (Source: Accenture)

What are our preferences on funding options?

Based on this analysis, our three main conclusions were:

1. **Membership and service fees could be our most viable, flexible and sustainable funding option** but we will probably not be able to grow them fast enough to fully cover our costs. It is likely to be 2027+ when our training offer is more mature that they ramp up substantially – so an interim funding source would be valuable.

2. **EU and national grants could be important 'stepping stones' to sustainability** in the interim, helping accelerate geographic expansion and innovation. Indeed, as shown in Annex Funding and Market research Excel file, we have found multiple funding opportunities for individuals as well as for projects and companies. This is true for our current target countries (for a future thematic / innovation expansion); as well as for other European and neighborhood countries (for a geographic expansion).
3. **Charging individual learners fees directly is not a suitable model for S4R** because it requires a 'Business to Consumer' (B2C) operating model, with more costly and complex capabilities for sales and marketing, billing, customer service and technical support. S4R will therefore seek to engage with learners indirectly via partners such as retailers, VET/HE institutes, public ministries or skilling bodies or EdTech companies who own leading learning platforms.

How do we expect the funding mix to evolve?

We propose evolving the funding mix over the S4R project duration and beyond in three phases:

Phase 1 (2025 - 2026):

- **Research and apply for EU and national grants** to fund expansion into new countries or innovations (e.g. integrating S4R training courses with a leading learning platform).
- **Refine tiered membership fee propositions,** research pricing from other membership fee-based initiatives and validate existing partners' willingness to pay.

  Some illustrative examples of pricing tiers for membership are below – to be refined with partners

  - **Low fees (e.g. for SMEs):** for train the trainer continuous support to adopt courses
  - **Medium fees (e.g. for VETs / public ministries or skilling agencies):** for sales and marketing support to re-sell training to students or employees
  - **High fees (e.g. for large retailers / EdTech companies):** for a 'seat at table' to shape the long term direction of S4R's training offering, business model, market role. Potential to develop brand association and networking offerings.

- **Refine training in response to lessons from pilots,** design and prepare to roll out related services linked to propositions

Phase 2 (2027 – 2028):

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- **Launch tiered membership fees** and propositions
- **Launch service fees** and propositions
- **Add partners** in new countries
- **Supplement** membership and service fee income with additional grant funding if awarded
- **Scale up** income generation from membership and service fees with goal of fully covering forecast costs

Phase 3 (2029+)

- **Achieve financial sustainability** as income from membership and service fees exceeds costs
- **Reinvest surplus** in:
    - Expanding S4R to more partners and countries
    - Continuously improve initial set of courses
    - Creating new courses
    - Improve user experience and business model by integrating all courses in learning platform(s)
- **Consider additional monetisation opportunities** – for instance, collaborating with private sector actors to develop partnerships. We would however avoid complicating the model by exploring these during earlier phases unless it is funded by a separate innovation grant

    Some illustrative examples of monetization opportunities are below – to be refined with partners

    - **Certification and micro-credential-based** pricing supplements – e.g. charging members based on course completions or improvements in scores that measure the levels of valuable skills for their employees
    - **Content and feature-based** pricing supplements – e.g. charging members extra for giving them access to additional training, or new features such as assessments and personalised recommendations for their learners
    - **Co-branding** – e.g. offer large national or international retail brands opportunities to collectively co-brand training for students or career switchers and gain access to talent pipelines (reducing recruitment and retention costs)
    - **Freemium model** based on attention monetisation – e.g. experiment with a free version of training including pop-up advertising as an alternative to make training content even more widely available
    - **Responsible data monetisation and advisory services** – e.g. Help HR Managers, Learning & Development Managers and SME retailers to improve recruitment and training using their data (with specific permissions) to analyse their skills gaps, benchmark their skills profiles against anonymised peer data and create tailored 6, 12 or 24 month plans to solve specific problems with training and recruitment interventions

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What are our open questions on funding?

The following questions will act as a focus for continued learning and strategy updates:

Innovation grants

- What innovations might we seek grant funding for and why?
- If we intend to integrate training course into an online learning platform (funded via a separate grant), do we still need to achieve certification for them and can we do so if the courses are no longer delivered by a specific VET/HE institute?
- Which specific grants will we apply for, when and why?
- How much effort will each application take, what is our win likelihood and the potential value?
- For each application – how much funding is requested and what is it budgeted for?

Geographic expansion grants

- What countries might we seek grant funding to expand into and why?
- Which specific grants will we apply for, when and why?
- How much effort will each application take, what is our win likelihood and the potential value?
- For each application – how much funding is requested and what is it budgeted for?

Membership and service fees

- How might we structure tiered pricing for members (how many member types and tiers etc.)?
- What is our proposition for each member type and tier (what benefits, for what fees)?
- How might we reward non-monetary contributions by members (e.g. staff time, training content, access to learning platform)?
- How much do other membership and service fee-based initiatives or Secretariat's charge, what do they offer in return and how long running and fast growing are they?
- What are existing S4R partners willing to pay for, what are their key considerations / barriers?
- How many members do we expect to sign up in each type in pricing tier in each year?

Other income generation

- Will we explore any additional monetisation opportunities during 2025 – 28?

Operating model and business case

- What is our operating model design – including:
    - What capabilities will we need as we grow?
    - What capabilities will be delivered by the S4R Secretariat, by partners or by suppliers?
    - What will our organisation structure be?
    - What will our salary and other people costs be?
    - What will our technology costs be?
    - What will our procurement costs be?
- What are our cost and income forecasts – and when will we break-even under key scenarios?
- What are our key scenarios (e.g. no grants; slower growth; lower pricing; higher cost drivers)

Partnership Strategy

What partners segments will we prioritise and why?

We identified seven segments of partners:

1. VET/HE institutes – note: while non-accredited institutes can be customers, only accredited institutes can be partners
2. Retailers – note: while SMEs can be customers, only large national or international networks can be partners
3. Public Sector Bodies – note: this includes Ministries or specialist national agencies responsible for the skilling agenda in their countries, as well as relevant EU agencies
4. Retail associations – as representatives of retail employers
5. Trade unions – as representatives of retail employees
6. Ed-tech companies – as owners of online learning platforms
7. Others – e.g. research centres or certification bodies / specialists who may be involved

We considered five categories of needs for the S4R Alliance: funding, training delivery, sales and marketing, market intelligence, other contributions, and identified 12 needs within these categories. We mapped these needs across partner segments to prioritise three 'Tier 1' partner segments.

Categories	Needs	Tier 1 Partner Segments			Tier 2 Partner Segments			
		VET/HE Institutes	Large Retailers	Public Sector Bodies	Ed tech companies	Retail associations	Trade unions	Others
Funding	Membership and service fees							
Training delivery	Training space & trainers							
	Training content							
	Learning platform(s)							
Sales and marketing	Access to retailers							
	Access to VET/HEs							
	Access to employees							
	Access to students							
Market intelligence	Skills needs analysis							
	Retail trends analysis							
Other contributions	Staff time / expertise							
	Input to shaping policy							

Figure 4. "Mapping of needs to partner segments" (Source: Accenture)

What are our priorities when expanding the partnership?

Based on this analysis, our main conclusions were:

- Our Tier 1 (Must Have) partner segments will be:
    A. Accredited VET/HE institutes

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B. Large national and international retailer networks
C. Public sector bodies responsible for skilling

- All three of these segments can potentially pay tiered membership fees and service fees in exchange for tailored propositions, as well as playing essential roles and multiple providing valuable contributions to S4R. They are 'Must Have' partners to achieve sustainability
- All other segments from Tier 2, especially existing S4R partners, while highly valued, are lower priority. They are 'Nice to Have' partners in terms of achieving sustainability
- S4R aims to engage 100+ partners in 33 countries by September 2027
- If we engage 1 VET/HE institute, 1 retailer and 1 public sector body in each of our 33 countries, we will exceed this target
- Some of our 30+ existing S4R Alliance partners will cover some of the 33 countries already – after we have mapped this, we can identify our gaps in Tier 1 partners by country
- We will consider taking a 'country by country' approach to engaging 1 VET/HE institute, 1 retailer and 1 public sector body in each of the 33 countries – with early focus on filling any gaps in this mix for the 8 pilot countries

How might we gradually formalise the partnership?

- Phase 1 (2025 - 2028): we will encourage partners to make flexible commitments of support (or 'pledges') to raise awareness of the S4R Alliance and encourage more new partners to join
- Phase 2 (2028+): we will create additional legal contracts as required formalizing new governance structure, membership and service fees and propositions (e.g. to account for partners making new contributions, bearing new risks or requesting changes)

What are our propositions for each key partner segment?

In the table below, we describe the mutual benefits of joining S4R for each of the Tier 1 segments.

Segment	What do they give to S4R?	What do they get from S4R?
Accredited VET/HE Institutes	• Course content • Training space & trainers • Use their own learning platform • Access to students • Membership fees • In each country – one VET/HE will engage the relevant certification body and own the local process	• Free access to training courses on S4R website – enabling them to boost employment prospects for students, attract new students / retailers and increase course fees • Support to integrate our courses into their existing curriculum – • Chance to shape free training for their own students • Support from S4R to achieve a new national certification • Access to retailers and partners who may become customers

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Large National and International Retailers	• Apprenticeship places for students on S4R training • Course content • Training space & trainers • Use their own learning platform • Access to employees • Membership fees • Option to sponsor co-branded training for students • Insight for regular refresh of training needs analysis	• Free access to training courses on S4R website – enabling them to improve retention, productivity, profitability and sustainability • Support to integrate our courses into their existing curriculum -it is expected to complement their own retailer specific basic training and address gaps related to the triple transition • Chance to shape training courses for their own employees • Change to attract fresh talent • Chance to shape future direction of S4R offering
Public Sector Bodies Responsible for Skilling	• They can recommend S4R courses to students, employees, retailers and VET/HE institutes who are receiving grants / subsidies they can use to pay for training and related services • Improved recognition and credibility for S4R brand nationwide • Insights on national labor market, trends, skills gaps, courses etc. for refresh of training needs analysis	• Free access to training courses on S4R website – enabling them to provide these to students, employees, retailers and VET/HE institutes who are receiving grants / subsidies for training • Improved skilling, employment and tax income • Reduced SME bankruptcies and better access to finance • Faster cuts in energy use, emissions and waste across retailers • Insights on skills needs and course registration and completion rates across countries to enable international benchmarking

Figure 5. "Tier 1 Partner Propositions" (Source: Accenture)

What is our approach to partnership management?

S4R will follow a seven-step partnership management lifecycle (illustrated below).

Step	Goal	Activities
1. Identify needs and gaps	Identify partner capabilities required by S4R and gaps in the current group	• Understand S4R's needs for training content, training delivery, access to retailers and students etc. by country • Map current partners' coverage of needs by country • Identify and prioritise gaps where new partners are needed
2. Discover and select	Identify and shortlist a selection of high-potential partners	• Conduct research, use industry networks and attend events to create a long-list of partners who could fill priortised gaps • Evaluate potential partners based on pre-defined criteria (fit with S4R vision and culture, capabilities, countries, etc.). • Short-list the best partners to engage.

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	for further engagement	
3. Engage and recruit	Cultivate relationships with shortlisted partners and persuade them to join S4R	• Develop and refine a collection of materials to explain the S4R proposition for each partner segment. • Conduct one-to-one meetings with short-listed partners to explore their needs, mutual benefits and questions • Develop custom proposals to recruit short-listed partners.
4. Negotiate and contract	Establish a ´win-win´ partnership through a mutually beneficial and legally sound agreement	• Conduct technical & commercial due diligence checks and negotiations on the partnership terms. • Secure pledges from partners (statements of commitment). • Later - formalize partnership through a Memorandum of understanding (MOU) or other legal contracts outlining the roles, responsibilities, rights and obligations of each party.

5. Onboard and set-up	Ensure seamless partner integration and establish clear communication channels for successful program delivery	• Develop and share onboarding materials; conduct training.
		• Enable project management set-up for implementation:
		  ○ Define roles and responsibilities
		  ○ Align on activities and design project plans
		  ○ Define KPIs and success measures
		  ○ Identify potential risks and challenges
		• Establish clear communication channels.

6. Monitor and evaluate	Continuously track partner performance through data-driven evaluation	• Provide ongoing support during implementation (e.g. escalating issues, making decisions, managing budgets). • Keep track of status and spending vs. benefits realized • Evaluate success measures including partner satisfaction. • Identify and manage risks & issues.
7. Optimise or exit	Make necessary improvements to maintain/increase program excellence	• Amend or improve plan of activities, success measures and goals etc. based on insights from evaluation. • Identify opportunities to renew or expand partner roles. • Manage partner termination where required (interviews, transition support, lessons learned and improvements).

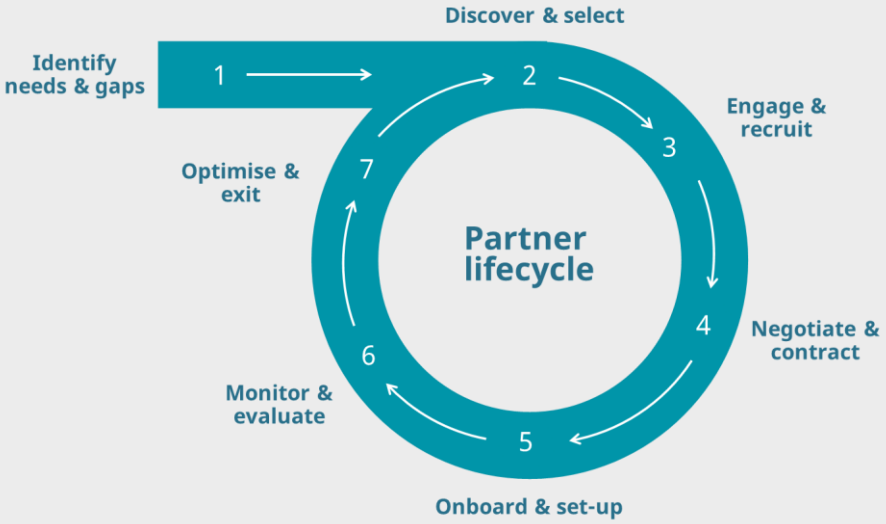


Figure 6. "Partnership Management Lifecycle" (Source: Accenture)

What is S4R Governance today and what changes are needed?

Currently, the S4R programme governance is set up as follows:

- 23 EU Grant Signatories participate in a quarterly Consortium Steering Committee meetings to facilitate strategic updates and in a monthly Work Package Coordination meetings to facilitate working level collaboration and mutual awareness across the six S4R WPs.
- 7 Associate Partners (who are not signed up to the EU Grant Agreement) also participate in both the Steering Committee and WP Coordination meetings.
- The S4R Industry Advisory Board meets twice a year for consultations.

In future, S4R Alliance governance will need to be redesigned – there is a need for:

- A strategic decision-making body – note: none of the current bodies play such a role and 30+ member groups make this difficult. There may be a case to have one consultative body for all partners and one decision making body where membership fees are linked to voting rights.
- An operational Secretariat – comprised of a small team with the right structure, roles, skills and experience, supported by relevant tools and processes to deliver S4R's growing ambitions. This Secretariat would be guided by directives from the decision-making body.

What ownership model might be suitable for a Secretariat?

We have considered four options related to Secretariat ownership (illustrated below).

Option	Advantages	Disadvantages
1. ALL PARTNERS CO-OWN THE SECRETARIAT	• 1 partner, 1 vote is a simple principle and may be more	• Added effort, complexity and delays

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• Income flows to a new legal entity (which needs to be set up) • Income is shared based on inputs and / or rights	appealing to partners who will not pay fees	to decide on and set up a new legal entity • Ongoing blurred responsibility and risk sharing among partners • Inefficient decision-making and unclear direction for Secretariat
2. A FEW PARTNERS CO-OWN THE SECRETARIAT • A subset of S4R partners contribute new investment (cash, resources, staff & time, facilities) into new legal entity • All partners are consulted, but only those who pay co-own the Secretariat • There is a risk-, cost- and profit-sharing agreement between those who co-invest	• We can decouple investment needs from membership fees – and directly raise what we need for Secretariat operating model design & set up from a few partners • This introduces a clear tiering with a few partners co-owning the Secretariat and making strategic decisions in the key governance body	• Added effort, complexity and delays to decide on and set up a new legal entity • Less equal decision making for non-fee paying partners
3. A SINGLE PARTNER OWNS THE SECRETARIAT • Income from membership fees flows to a single partner (this would require further consultation on who might be most appropriate and why) • No new legal entity is created • They manage budgets, bear risks of cost overruns or delays and are entitled to more reward • They compensate partners for inputs (e.g. services provided) • The Secretariat is guided by a Strategic Decision Making Body, where votes are linked to membership fees paid	• Better accountability and control with one clear budget owner • Partner compensation is fair (based only on inputs) • Allows for co-ownership of decision-making - but based on the principle that paying more fees gives members greater rights • Avoid setting up a new legal entity – less effort, complexity and delays	• Less equal decision making for non-fee paying partners

Figure 7 "Options for Secretariat ownership"

The options above will be refined in response to further consultation with partners and updated proposals for governance arrangements will be detailed in future strategy updates.

What are our open questions on partnership and governance?

The following questions will act as a focus for continued learning and strategy updates:

Partner engagement:

- Which specific Tier 1 partners will we engage for each of the 33 countries?
- What are our propositions for Tier 1 partners – and how well do they resonate?
- What materials will we use to support each stage of the partner lifecycle steps?
-

Governance:

- What will we call our strategic decision-making body and who will be in it?
- What will decision making be based on and (how) will it be linked to membership fees?
- Will we have a (separate and larger) consultative body, what will we call it and who will be in it?
- Who might be the most appropriate single owner for the Secretariat and why – or are other models preferred by the S4R partners?
- Will a new legal entity be required (for new governance arrangements or grant applications)?
- What is the operating model design for the Secretariat – note: this may include defining the:
    - Organisation structure
    - Job Descriptions
    - Technology Architecture
    - Processes
    - Culture (mindsets, values and behaviours)
    - Success measures and motivators

Certification Strategy

Ensuring the sustainability via certification in "Skills4Retail" project, where to go? What is planned and realistic to achieve by September 2027?

The sustainability in European projects has always been a challenge: Ensuring the project's longevity after its official end. The success in similar initiatives was based on multiple key factors as the quality of products, costs and accessibility to wider target groups and finally accreditation and/or certification possibilities.

In the *Skills4Retail* project, Work Package 3: Develop the VET Training Curriculum, Content & Certifications. As the name mentions, this WP focuses on developing a new VET curriculum and associated content. This includes creating new Retail Skills certifications for each training program, which are tied to specific occupational profiles. The work involves designing certifications for shorter courses, assigning micro-credentials to each learning module, and ensuring these certifications gain national and eventually European recognition. Work Package 6: Long Term Sustainability Strategy to scale up activities post project is, on the other hand, dedicated to the dissemination and validation of these training programs. It aims to ensure their adoption and implementation across various educational and industrial contexts, thereby supporting a sustainable stream of new talent and the ongoing upskilling and reskilling in the retail sector.

By September 2027, the project previews to:

- establish a long-term sustainability plan for funding, dissemination, and training programs.
- align training programs with EU frameworks such as EQF, ESCO, EQAVET, and EUROPASS.
- create a sustainable learning program that meets EU retail skills standards.

It is also very important to mention that certifications are not an isolated field of action in this project but it truly depends on the format of the courses, piloting experience and feedback provided by stakeholders. Based on previous experiences and similar project initiatives, certification could serve as a solid option to support the sustainability package, as it involves less complexity and takes less time than accreditation while effectively meeting project objectives. The interconnectedness of certification and micro-credentials could provide flexible pathways, validating specific skills through micro-credentials that can be combined into full certifications.

The Approach: Accreditation vs. Certification

Accreditation and certification serve distinct functions within Vocational Education and Training. Accreditation is an external process that verifies that VET providers and programs meet specific standards, accreditation can also allow a student to have their learning academically recognised and progress through EQF levels. It applies to institutions and programs, involves detailed evaluations by an external body, and results in programs being listed in official registers, which can attract funding and partnerships. The tools launched by the European Commission alongside the Member States, aimed to focus on the need for increased transparency and comparability of skills and qualifications. Many of these tools address citizens directly, as is the case for Europass and the credit systems for higher education (ECTS) and VET (ECVET).

The tools supporting cooperation on quality assurance in higher education (ESG) and VET (EQAVET) aim to increase trust and transparency between countries. The EQF works together with other European

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and international instruments supporting the recognition of qualifications. While these instruments either focus on regulated and/or academic qualifications, the EQF supports the recognition of learning for all qualifications. "What is certification? Effectively, certification is the third-party confirmation via audit of an organisation's systems or products, whilst accreditation is independent third-party recognition that an organisation has the competence and impartiality to perform specific technical activities such as certification, testing and inspection". Certification is the process of issuing a certificate, diploma or title formally attesting that a set of learning outcomes (knowledge, skills and competences) acquired by an individual have been assessed and validated by a competent body against a predefined standard' (CEDEFOP, 2018) however, confirms that individuals or specific training programs meet defined quality standards through assessments or exams, providing credentials that demonstrate qualifications and skills.

Although the accreditation process ensures official recognition and can increase the value and acceptance of programs across countries, it is typically a lengthy and complex process that incurs substantial costs for external validation and continuous quality improvements, "(...) If the result of the evaluation is negative, accreditation will be denied and the VET provider will have to prepare and apply again after having improved its organisational structures and the quality of its training". Despite its benefits for enhancing credibility and recognition, the nature and cost implications of accreditation make it less suitable for this project, but it should not be excluded, as previously suggested. Through connections with consortium partners, such as the University of Bucharest, shorter programmes such as modules or Micro-Credentials can be accredited in a shorter term (⅔ months).

As previously mentioned, the accreditation process whilst complex, is a decision that requires a thorough discussion on its advantages and drawbacks, its criteria and it needs to be approved by the whole consortium demanding submission and final approval from the project coordinator and long-term commitment for the project's sustainability, which at this stage of project is hard to be verified.

Certification, by contrast, is a more practical and cost-effective option. It offers immediate recognition and credibility, making programs more appealing to students and employers without the extensive costs and complexity associated with accreditation. Therefore, certification is a more feasible and efficient choice for improving the recognition and credibility of training programs within the project.

Integration of micro-credentials in certification: Yes, if possible!

Microcredentials are increasingly acknowledged and incorporated into certification processes for VET programs, representing smaller units of learning, micro-credentials validate specific skills or competencies. They could be accumulated over time and combined to achieve full certification, offering a flexible and modular approach to education. It enables learners to progressively build their qualifications and showcase skills that are pertinent to industry requirements, but still their use must be adapted to a type, length, relevance or content of courses. For example, in the recent report of CEDEFOP, "Microcredentials do not always allow accumulation and stacking and are not always linked to EQF/NQF levels. In Spain, microcredentials can be stacked and lead to a formal VET certificate under its new Organic Law for the Ordination and Integration of VET.

Latvia's new law also allows microcredentials to be accumulated towards a full qualification or to be used as stand-alone". To reinforce the approach, during the European Commission recent Peer

learning activity: “Microcredentials in manufacturing and retail discussed by stakeholders, it was mentioned that microcredentials are very flexible and everybody can use them to upgrade their skills.’ Still this needs to be re-confirmed after the work-package 3 and work-package 4 are being successfully concluded.

A “hybrid model”: to consider?

A hybrid certification model effectively could connect national standards with additional European and business certifications to create a comprehensive and versatile certification system. This approach leverages national certification to ensure adherence to local regulations and quality standards, while also incorporating European frameworks such as the European Qualifications Framework (EQF) and the European Credit System for Vocational Education and Training (ECVET). Additionally, it integrates industry-specific certifications to enhance international recognition and relevance. The five main benefits of a **Hybrid Model** for Certification include:

- **Compliance with National Standards:** Programs aligned with a hybrid model meet rigorous national certification requirements, ensuring they adhere to local regulations and are recognized for their quality at a European level.
- **Alignment with Industry Certifications:** By incorporating industry-specific certifications, this model aligns training programs with the skills and competencies demanded by employers, making graduates more attractive to employers across Europe.
- **Portability of Qualifications:** The integration of European certification tools facilitates the portability of qualifications within the EU. This supports learner and workforce mobility, allowing qualifications to be recognized and valued across different countries.
- **Incorporation of Business Certifications:** Including business certifications validates practical, job-specific skills, ensuring that the training is current, relevant, and valuable in the job market. This maintains the program's alignment with the evolving needs of employers.
- **Flexible Qualification Pathways:** The hybrid model offers a flexible pathway to accumulate qualifications through micro-credentials. These credentials can be recognized both locally and internationally, enhancing the overall value and appeal of the training program, and allowing learners to build their qualifications progressively.
- **Delivering Flexible Learning:** will allow participants to engage at their own pace, relevant for Retail SMEs.

How to obtain certification? (by September 2027)

Achieving certification provides immediate confirmation of a training program's quality and relevance within the industry. Learners, employers, and other stakeholders often regard certified programs as more credible and trustworthy. This credibility is essential for attracting dedicated and committed

participants who are looking for recognized and valuable qualifications. These are the steps to follow to obtain it:

1. Ensure Alignment with National and European Standards:

- Align your training program with national standards established by the EU Member State;
- Match the program to the European Qualifications Framework (EQF) to enable recognition across the EU.

2. Establish a Comprehensive Quality Management System:

- Develop a strong quality management system with regular reviews, feedback mechanisms, and continuous improvement processes;
- Document your training program thoroughly, including learning outcomes, assessment methods, and quality assurance procedures.

3. Identify Appropriate Certification Bodies:

- Consider pursuing ISO 9001 certification for quality management systems to demonstrate compliance with international standards for quality and continuous improvement;
- Explore certifications from professional associations, industry bodies, or specialized certification agencies.

4. Engage with Certification Agencies:

- Reach out to relevant certification agencies to understand their specific requirements and the application process;
- Obtain support and guidance from these agencies to ensure that your application is complete and meets all necessary criteria.

5. Be ready for External Audits:

- Conduct internal audits to verify that your program meets certification standards before undergoing external audits;
- Be prepared for certification agencies to conduct external audits, providing necessary evidence and documentation to demonstrate compliance.

6. Leverage the ECVET System:

- Design your training program in accordance with the European Credit System for Vocational Education and Training (ECVET), facilitating certification and recognition across Europe.

7. Promote Transparency and Communicate Effectively:

- Clearly display the certification status and standards of the training program on the project website;
- Interact with stakeholders, including learners, employers, and industry groups, to highlight the value and acknowledgment of your certified training program.

The certification process has its costs, but that partnership should discuss in later stages of the project and adjust according to project budget and feasibility of actions. In any case, the certification should be a bare minimum in order to ensure sustainability of the project outcomes.

Skills4Retail Certification workshop: summary and outcomes

During the certification workshop taking place on 12 April 2024, several accreditation bodies were highlighted as potential options for the future certification of Skills4Retail courses. European tools for certification in VET include the European Cooperation for Accreditation (EA) and National Accreditation Bodies (NABs). The following tools were presented:

Body	**Description**
The European Quality Assurance Register for Higher Education (EQAR)	Registers quality assurance agencies in the EHEA, ensuring compliance with ESG standards.
The Europass Certificate Supplement	Details vocational qualifications to aid international applications.
The European Accreditation Council for Business Education	Accredits management education programs through independent reviews,
European Business and Innovation Centre Network (EU|BIC)	Certifies high standards of business support for innovative entrepreneurs.
European Association for Higher Education Advancement (EAHEA)	Accredits institutions globally, promoting excellence through accreditation, training, and networking.

A unified European approach was found to be more efficient, cost-effective, and better aligned with the overall objectives of the Skills4Retail initiative. In the closing discussion, several key points emerged:

- Regarding content development, there was an effort to focus on the creation of microcredentials and occupational profiles, with a commitment to ensuring validation mentioned in the projects' grant agreement.
- Analyse further European tools that might provide more feasibility in terms of certification. For example, the European Quality Assurance Register for Higher Education could be consulted to provide European certification opportunities. Follow-up recommendations included scheduling meetings with EQAR and conducting a thorough review of the results from needs analysis to determine course content effectively.
- Continue analysing national contexts with project partners to define institutions in charge, timeline and costs of accreditation and/or certification.

General conclusion and follow-up

Obtaining certification for a VET programme is easier and faster than obtaining full accreditation, especially if the goal is to enhance recognition within a specific sector (For example Retail) or for a particular type of training. Certification focuses on compliance with established standards and can provide immediate validation of the quality and relevance of the training program.

What are our open questions on certification?

- What are the minimum certification requirements that must be met to ensure that the Skills4Retail training programs are recognized and valued by employers and learners across different European countries?
- What is the feasibility of accrediting the Skills4Retail courses in addition to certification, considering the associated costs, time, and resource implications?
- How can the project balance the need for immediate certification with the long-term benefits of accreditation to enhance the overall sustainability and credibility of the training programs?
- How will the integration of micro-credentials be effectively managed within the Skills4Retail certification process to ensure they align with both national and European standards?
- What specific steps are needed to secure the necessary partnerships within European and business certification bodies to enhance the credibility and recognition of the Skills4Retail training programs?
- What measures will be taken to address the variations in certification processes across different countries to ensure a unified approach for the Skills4Retail initiative?
- How will the project ensure ongoing engagement and feedback from stakeholders to continuously improve the certification process and maintain alignment with industry needs?
- What are the potential cost implications and resource requirements for implementing a hybrid certification model that includes both national and European certifications, and how will these be managed within the project's budget?

Implementation plan

Our integrated implementation plan contains 7 workstreams. 4 workstreams relate directly to the Sustainability Strategy and are on the following page (with activities highlighted in orange and milestones in blue cells). Please note that this plan is a living document, which will be continuously updated.

Year	2024		2025				2026				2027			
Quarter	3	4	1	2	3	4	1	2	3	4	1	2	3	4
Workstream 3: Develop a sustainable funding model and expand the S4R Alliance (WP6) **Owner: JA Europe**														
Partnership strategy finalised														
Develop propositions - i.e. membership tiers and pricing for tier 1 partners (large international retailers, national retailers, VET/HE institutes, government ministries)														
Engage 3 - 5 representatives from each type of tier 1 partner, gather feedback on propositions and test willingness to pay and refine the propositions														
Design the governance model														
100 partners onboarded by end of grant period														
Map where we already have partners by country and estimate additional effort required to engage 1 retailer, 1 VET/HE and 1 public institution per country x 33 countries														
Confirm if it is possible to reach the goal of 100 partners by Sep 27 taking a country-by-country approach with the resource available														
Prioritise countries (e.g. first fill all 3 slots in the 8 countries, then fill where we have 1 or 2 exisitng partners present, finally fill where we have none)														
Engage initial set of paying members (e.g. subset of retailers in IAB + VET/HE institutes in Consortium) and set up new governance model														
Execute on partner engagement (till we reach 3 partners per country x 33 countries + any additional members)														
Workstream 4: Secure new public grant funding to subsidise innovation and expansion (WP6) **Owner: Schuman Associated**														
New grant(s) to fund country expansion secured														
Research and prioritise grant opportunities that match our needs (e.g. what EU and national grants might fund expansion into new countries vs. innovation)														
Shape grant application proposal, estimate the implementation costs, engage partners, allocate roles and budgets and submit the bid														
Review lessons from initial round of applications and adjust approach for future														
New grant(s) to fund innovation secured														
Shape grant application proposal, estimate the implementation costs, engage partners, allocate roles and budgets and submit the bid														
Review lessons from initial round of applications and adjust approach for future														
Workstream 5: Develop an efficient approach to certification and support VET/HE applications (WP6) **Owner: OTB**														
Certification Strategy finalised														
Evaluate via targeted interviews if retailers and students value certification by national bodies highly enough to justify the time and cost of achieving it - or if another solution (e.g. recognition by Eurocommerce + IAB members) is a better practical alternative														
Evaluate if achieving certification is possible if all courses are uploaded to a third party learning platform														
Define the approach to achieve certification at EQF level 3-8														
Develop the micro-credential approach														
Support achievement of certification														
Based on approach chosen - identify the relevant national and / or EU certification bodies, retailers / VET/HE partners, allocate roles in the certification process, estimate effort / cost required from each of them and secure commitments or adjust plans until all partners are agreed														
Workstream 6: Review evidence, capture lessons and publish Sustainability strategy updates (WP6) **Owner: Schuman Associates**														
Sustainability Strategy updated														
Gather evidence and capture lessons														
Review evidence and lessons, discuss open questions and **informal** update of the strategy														
Review evidence and lessons, discuss open questions and **formal** update of the strategy														

Figure 8 "Implementation plan for WP6 workstreams"

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Additional 3 workstreams relate primarily to Retail Skilling Strategy (WP2) - but are deeply interconnected with the 4 workstreams above and are shown below to illustrate interdependencies.

Year	2024		2025				2026				2027			
Quarter	3	4	1	2	3	4	1	2	3	4	1	2	3	4
Workstream 1: Design, maintain & improve the curriculum (WP2 & WP3) **Owner: Skillnet**														
D 3.1. Core VET Curriculum of emerging courses designed														
Agree a viable number of pathways and modules to create														
Prioritise personas and engage representatives to understand their individual training needs and barriers (e.g. 3 - 5 people per persona)														
Co-design the learning pathways and modules in the chosen format with representative learners (test & iterate)														
D 3.3. VET Training programme designed (Phase 1 – Materials for Pilot Training)														
Design, test and launch "train the trainer" approach in collaboration with VET/HEs for pilots														
Reach out to all partners and scan available open source material, map content to design and identify specific needs for content access rights, translation and creation														
Agree partners to own content access, translation and creation, effort allocations and timelines and prioritise opportunities within these constraints to fill content gaps														
D 3.3. VET Training programme designed (Phase 2 – Ready to Use Training Materials)														
Finalise learning pathways with a defined number of modules for each persona														
Capture lessons and improve content, platforms, train the trainer etc.														
Estimate effort required and prioritise opportunities														
Allocate roles and execute on improvements / new content creation / new personas and pathways														
Workstream 2: Coordinate the rollout of training courses (WP4) **Owner: JA Europe**														
Confirm participation process for beneficiaries														
Promotion of the 8 training programmes in Austria, Hungary, Czech Republic, Latvia, Romania, Ireland, Malta, Portugal started														
Identify and onboard VET training providers and HEI to deliver the trainings (16)														
Identify and approach employers (in collaboration with WP1) to participate in mentorship, job shadowing, apprenticeships, or job placement opportunities for graduates (50)														
Identify beneficiaries in close collaboration with education institutions & companies (800)														
Pilots across the 8 countries (training and facilitiation to employment) launched														
"Train the trainers" for VET training providers and HEI to deliver the trainings (if necessary)														
Provide support to VET training providers and HEI														
Collaborate with participating employers to create pathways for at least 300 upskilled workers to start new or enhanced roles within their current organizations														
Capture lessons and improve content, platforms, train the trainer														
Promotion of the 8 training programmes (Ready to Use Training Materials) across EU started														
Provide support to start in new countries														
Workstream 7: Review evidence, capture lessons and publish Retail Strategy updates (WP2) **Owner: WKO**														
Skills Strategy updated														
Gather evidence and capture lessons														
Refresh Training Needs Analysis														
Review evidence and lessons, discuss open questions and update strategy (first informal, second formal)														

Figure 9: "Implementation plan for WP2, WP3, WP4 workstreams"

Assumptions and Dependencies

Assumptions

The strategic framework for the project is built on several key assumptions:

- **Consortium Participation:** It is anticipated that a sufficient number of partners will remain engaged in the consortium and demonstrate willingness to continue the project.
- **Willingness to Pay:** Retailers and training companies are expected to be willing to invest both financially and in terms of time to participate in the training programs.
- **Training Relevance:** The training offered will be relevant and valuable to retailers, leading to positive impacts on their business operations.
- **Membership Fees:** It is assumed that recruited partners will be willing to pay membership fees in order to stay involved and access the services provided by the consortium.

Dependencies

The successful execution of the project is dependent on the following factors:

- **Revenue Stream:** The sustainability of the revenue stream from membership fees hinges on recruiting a sufficient number of partners who are willing to pay these fees.
- **Grant Applications:** Participation in grant applications may necessitate the establishment of a separate legal entity for S4R to be eligible for various grants.
- **Certification:**
    - It is crucial to obtain a credible and timely certification for S4R to build a strong reputation and expand the network.
    - The certification must be recognized by funding bodies to enhance the likelihood of securing funding through grant applications.

Risks and Mitigations

In order to ensure the robustness of the project, several potential risks have been identified along with corresponding mitigation strategies:

- **Risk 1: Insufficient Funds for Grant Applications**
    - **Mitigation:** Proactively secure a corporate sponsor or partner willing to provide the necessary financial support for grant applications.
- **Risk 2: Lack of Suitable EU Funding Calls**
    - **Mitigation:** Diversify funding efforts by focusing on securing national funding opportunities as an alternative to EU funding calls.
- **Risk 3: Insufficient Partner Retention in Consortium**
    - **Mitigation:** Increase efforts to recruit participants from the "join the pledge" initiative, converting them into full consortium members to ensure sustained partner retention.

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- **Risk 4: Certification Lacks Credibility**
    - **Mitigation:** Enhance and extend the scope of training courses to achieve microcredentials or academic accreditation, thereby boosting the credibility of the certification.
- **Risk 5: Certification Not Nationally Accredited**
    - **Mitigation:** Design the certification program to meet national accreditation standards and offer affordable online training options independently of external funding.

Adaptive learning and continuous improvement

Continuous improvement of S4R should be achieved through regular refreshment of Training Needs analysis (D 2.1), Retail Skilling Strategy (D 2.2) and Sustainability Strategy (D 6.1).

Training needs analysis will be updated together with Retail Skilling Strategy in Month 30 and Month 42, informing Sustainability Strategy (D 6.1.) as well as Curriculum Design (D 3.1.) for further updates.

The Long-Term Sustainability Strategy will be updated on Month 24 and Month 36 as lessons are learned and will be reviewed internally by IAB and Consortium members. Another update will be conducted officially (with publishing the document) in Month 48 before the end of the current grant period.

Work Package 1 (JAE) will continuously capture and centralize key learnings relevant to strategic considerations throughout the program duration. This process will leverage insights from the monthly Work Package Leader (WPL) meetings and JA's oversight role. Subsequently, leads for Work Packages 1, 2, and 6 will convene dedicated sessions with the corresponding S4R partners.

These sessions will focus on:

- Discussing captured learnings and their potential impact on each program deliverable.
- Identifying any outstanding questions that require further exploration.

Following these discussions, Work Package Leads will be responsible for updating their respective deliverables, with the ongoing support of relevant partners.

Note: On the question of “How will we improve the training curriculum and content” please see D 2.2. “Retail Skilling Strategy”.

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Dissemination

What are our goals for dissemination?

This document should be disseminated to achieve several goals:

1. Raising Awareness and Gaining Buy-In:

- Increase awareness of the S4R´s Long-term Sustainability Strategy goals and its key elements (Social Business Model, Funding Strategy, Partnership Strategy, Certification Strategy, Implementation plan) among stakeholders (with a focus on current and potential partners).
- Generate buy-in and support for the Long-Term Sustainability Strategy from key decision-makers and partners.

2. Attracting Collaboration and Partnerships:

- Attract new partners who can contribute to S4R program.
- Encourage collaboration among existing partners to achieve shared sustainability goals.

3. Knowledge Sharing, Capacity Building and Program Improvement:

- Share best practices and lessons learned through the implementation of the S4R program among partners.
- Review and improve of the Long-term Sustainability Strategy based on the feedback of stakeholders, lessons learned and maturity development of the Program.

How will we disseminate the Sustainability Strategy?

With **existing** partners:

- Present and share the document with all current partners via the S4R Portal (i.e. Sharepoint) once the document is submitted and finally approved.
- Organize workshops and sessions with WP6 partners in order to discuss open questions and make strategic decisions and share the outcomes during WP Lead meetings/ during annual update of the Sustainability Strategy (within the current grant period)

With **potential** partners:

- Share the document with new partners while obtaining the pledges / signing the legal contracts (upon development of partnership formalization mechanisms)
- Publish the document on the S4R website
- Include the document in the onboarding materials

Open questions on Sustainability Strategy dissemination:

How might we align and create synergies with Pact4Skills on, e.g.:

- engaging more partners
- exploring new funding opportunities
- certification and micro-credentials approach
- avoiding duplication of efforts
- supporting dissemination of courses
- sourcing and integrating training content?

Annexes

1. Lessons from other EU Blueprints: interviews and interpretation
2. Funding and Market research on EU and national grants: Excel sheet and interpretation

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Annex: Lessons from other Blueprints

Lucia Grilli on GreenSkills4Hydrogen and FemmeForward

The Green Skills for Hydrogen project, an Erasmus+ supported blueprint, will aim to contribute to effectively educate, upskill and reskill individuals and address the needs of the hydrogen sector.

FemmeForward is an EU funded project aimed at empowering women with the skills and confidence to launch tech careers or form new startups.

How fast did the Blueprints project grow in terms of learners, countries, and partners?

The growth of learners, countries, and partners in the Blueprints project has been steady. Specific growth metrics were not provided, but the project has expanded significantly since its inception.

How were the grants secured and income generated?

FemmeForward does not generate revenue directly from its activities. Funding primarily comes from AWS, which pays for participation in bids and covers most of the costs. AWS certification, part of the Re-Start programme, is used by partners to train students. AWS benefits by receiving indirect budget through the promotion of their certification across Europe, funded by the EU budget. Similarly, for GreenSkills, HydrogenEurope and the Hydrogen Europe Academy fund the initiatives.

What was your sustainability strategy, and how was it implemented?

The sustainability strategy for both FemmeForward and GreenSkills involves leveraging the support of large organizations and securing funding from major stakeholders like AWS and HydrogenEurope. This approach includes having a strong network of partners who can engage with local authorities and stakeholders. There is no commercial plan for either project; they are primarily funded through grants (80% from Erasmus and 20% from AWS).

What kind of certification approach are you following, and what is your experience with this approach so far?

Both projects use AWS certification under the Re-Start programme. This approach has been successful as partners use AWS certification to train students, allowing the training to be widely implemented across Europe without direct costs to the training organizations. AWS receives indirect funding and promotes its certification extensively through this method.

Do you think FemmeForward and GreenSkills have opportunities that could be shared for S4R?

Yes, there are opportunities for S4R to consider similar partners, grants, and pricing strategies. Sharing training content and learning from the certification approach used in FemmeForward and GreenSkills could also be beneficial. These projects demonstrate the value of having a big company behind them, securing funding, and maintaining a good network.

Additional Notes:

- FemmeForward is successful at the local level due to the partners' networks.
- Neither project has a commercial plan but relies heavily on grants and partner funding.
- AWS recruited and selected new partners for FemmeForward, including expanding to additional countries.
- The incentive for partners includes being part of an EU project, carrying out trainings, networking, and receiving funding for additional trainings.

These insights suggest that similar strategies could be applied to S4R to enhance its sustainability and growth.

David Fitzgerald on ARISA and ESSA

ARISA fast-tracks the upskilling and reskilling of employees, job seekers, business leaders and policymakers into AI-related professions to open Europe to new business opportunities. It is a four-year transnational project funded under the Erasmus+ programme.

ESSA is an Erasmus+ programme and involves ambitious partners from industry and academia. The project aims at creating a solid framework to educate and train people into high demand software roles.

How fast did the Blueprints project grow in terms of learners, countries, and partners?

ARISA is currently running pilot programs and is not yet commercially viable, with the pilot set to complete two years at the end of May. ESSA has also recently started its pilot program, which is expected to run for four years. Both projects are still in their early stages, with different viewpoints on course content, and have not yet developed concrete programs or proven their market value.

How were the grants secured and income generated?

Neither ARISA nor ESSA have generated income or secured grants so far. ARISA has been running for two years, and ESSA for four years, but neither has demonstrated that their developments are market-worthy or profitable.

What was your sustainability strategy, and how was it implemented?

Both projects have an aspirational sustainability strategy that has not yet been implemented. The strategy involves developing a sustainable learning program, but the details and execution are still in progress. David mentioned putting us in contact with the people in charge of these strategies for further information.

What kind of certification approach are you following, and what is your experience with this approach so far?

The certification approach for ARISA involves an academic approach through ASIIN. For ESSA, they opted for a quality label instead of full certification or accreditation due to the rigorous requirements and high commitment needed for certification. This approach has been challenging, with issues in accreditation processes making it a significant undertaking.

Do you think ESSA and ARISA have opportunities that could be shared with S4R?

While there are opportunities for sharing knowledge and strategies, there are concerns about alignment with S4R's vision and target market, which focuses on retail workers at a lower level. Additionally, there are risks of potential sabotage from promises made by ESSA and ARISA that might not be delivered, affecting credibility. Collaboration with these projects might not bring added value to S4R.

Notes on Sustainability Strategy:

- Certified programs are preferred over accredited ones due to the challenges in the accreditation process.
- The strategy involves developing sustainable learning programs, but this is still in development.
- There is concern about the resources of academic partners and the dilution of efforts as the projects progress.

Opportunities and Risks:

- Confidentiality concerns limit the sharing of specific information.
- Potential collaborations need to be carefully considered to avoid conflicts and ensure they align with S4R's goals.
- The focus should be on ensuring that collaborations do not compromise the credibility and value of S4R.

In summary, both ESSA and ARISA are in the early stages of development with pilot programs and have yet to secure income or grants. Their sustainability strategies are still being formulated, and their certification approaches face significant challenges. Opportunities for collaboration with S4R exist but need careful consideration to avoid potential risks and ensure alignment with S4R's objectives.

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Interpretation and conclusions from the interviews conducted

1. Local Independent Retailers

Interview of VOSZ:

Question: What benefits would they value most?

Answer: Local independent retailers are already cooperating with large retail chains such as SPAR. They are already benefiting from the external training programs.

Question: What might they contribute?

Answer: Retailers are a thrifty lot. I think that a retailer would be prepared to pay between €100 and €300 per annum!

Question: What might they be willing to pay membership fees for?

Answer: They already pay a fee e.g., to SPAR; they would not accept an additional fee.

Question: Who would make the buying decision for them?

Answer: The retailer makes the purchasing decision himself. They are independent.

Question: What would make the proposition most attractive to them?

Answer: On the one hand, there are legal requirements that have to be complied with, and on the other, there are all the measures that achieve visible success directly with the customer.

Question: What are their main barriers to uptake?

Answer: We will only achieve this through the large chains. In other words, we have to try to create this added value for retailers via the large retail chains. Of course, this is perhaps a very Austrian view. But I think that applies to many franchise systems in the retail sector.

Interpretation:

The responses from local independent retailers reveal a strong inclination towards mutual cooperation and community-based initiatives. They emphasize the value of collaborative efforts among retailers to foster sustainable practices. One of the primary benefits they seek is the support and recognition for their sustainability efforts. This could manifest as certifications or official acknowledgments that enhance their market reputation and attract sustainability-conscious consumers.

These retailers indicate a willingness to contribute actively to sustainability initiatives. They are open to participating in local projects and sharing their practices, which can create a ripple effect, encouraging

more retailers to adopt similar measures. However, their contributions are likely to be more qualitative than financial, given their resource constraints. The willingness to pay a membership fee is tentative and hinges significantly on the perceived value of the benefits offered. They currently pay fees to organizations like SPAR, suggesting a familiarity with such financial commitments, provided there is a clear return on investment.

2. International Retail Chains

Interview of SPAR

Question: What benefits would they value most?

Answer: They can learn from each other's good practices, knowledge transfer strengthens sustainability. Some European countries have national regulatory frameworks, others are developing them now, it's a good occasion to share good practices.

Question: What might they contribute?

Answer: They are certainly willing to contribute to sharing good practices for sustainability.

Question: What might they be willing to pay membership fees for?

Answer: Awareness raising events, good practices.

Question: Roughly how much might they be willing to pay for that per annum?

Answer: 1,000-2,000 units.

Question: Who would make the buying decision for them?

Answer: The appropriate decision-maker within the organization, depending on the structure.

Question: What would make the proposition most attractive to them?

Answer: Opportunities for learning and applying best practices to enhance sustainability and meet regulatory requirements.

Question: What are their main barriers to uptake?

Answer: The main barriers include varying national regulatory frameworks and the initial costs involved in implementing sustainable practices.

Interpretation:

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International retail chains highlight the importance of learning from one another's best practices and the collective sharing of resources. The benefits they value most include access to information that can help them enhance their sustainability efforts and improve their corporate image. These chains are well-positioned to lead by example due to their extensive resources and global reach.

Their contributions are multifaceted. They are willing to share expertise, resources, and participate in events that raise awareness about sustainable practices. This group shows a readiness to invest in sustainability initiatives, viewing it as an essential component of their corporate responsibility and brand identity. The proposed membership fee they are willing to pay is around 1,000-2,000 units, indicating a considerable commitment to the cause, provided the benefits align with their strategic goals.

3. National Entities

Interview of SKILLNET IRELAND

Question: What benefits would they value most?

Answer: For government actors, the main benefits of S4R would be to share best practices and raise awareness around challenges identified. They could help in coordinating retail clusters within countries or at more local/regional levels.

Question: What might they contribute?

Answer: Government actors could contribute to sharing best practices and helping coordinate efforts across different levels.

Question: What might they be willing to pay membership fees for?

Answer: They could pay a fee to get insights on sector needs with a European lens, showing how Ireland fairs, and where the best practices exist in Europe. They could be interested in joining modules relevant for civil servants working on specific retail policies.

Question: Roughly how much might they be willing to pay for that per annum?

Answer: 1,000-2,000€

Question: Who would make the buying decision for them?

Answer: In Ireland, the right Principal Officer in charge of Retail in the Department of Enterprise or the HR of that Department.

Question: What would make the proposition most attractive to them?

Answer: Ensuring that this offering helps them implement their policies successfully and how they are linked to wider European and national policy priorities, ensuring that Ireland is positioned as a best practice.

Question: What are their main barriers to uptake?

Answer: Insights on the needs of the retail sector at national level may already be produced by existing industry bodies. It may be difficult to find the decision-makers within the civil service who would decide on the training programs. Civil servants often have limited time and may not be interested in developing niche expertise in the retail sector.

Interpretation:

For national entities, the main benefits of a sustainability strategy are centered around gaining insights into sector-specific trends and enhancing public-private collaboration. They see value in the potential for improved policy and regulatory frameworks that support sustainability. This aligns with their broader mandate of fostering economic development while ensuring environmental stewardship.

National entities are prepared to contribute by sharing data, insights, and collaborating on developing policies that facilitate sustainability across the retail sector. Their willingness to pay a membership fee is driven by the access to detailed analyses and insights that can inform their regulatory and supportive roles. The fee range suggested, 1,000-2,000€, reflects their budget allocations for strategic initiatives and research.

Global Recommendations

This strategy should prioritize fostering collaboration, providing support and incentives, offering flexible membership models, advocating for supportive policies, and raising awareness.

First, creating a collaborative environment where both local and international retailers can share best practices and knowledge is crucial. This could be facilitated through regular forums, workshops, and an online platform dedicated to sustainability in retail. Such initiatives would not only enhance learning but also build a community of practice committed to sustainability.

Support and incentives should be tailored to the needs of each group. For local retailers, providing certifications or official recognitions could be a significant motivator. International chains, on the other hand, might benefit more from platforms that enhance their corporate reputation and provide strategic insights into global sustainability trends.

Flexible membership models are essential to accommodate the varied financial capabilities of different retailers. Smaller local retailers might benefit from lower-tier memberships with access to essential

resources and support, while larger international chains could opt for premium memberships that offer extensive insights and networking opportunities.

Advocacy for supportive policies should be a cornerstone of the strategy. Working closely with national entities to ensure that sustainability initiatives align with government policies can help create a conducive environment for sustainable practices. This collaboration can also help in developing regulations that support and incentivize sustainability across the sector.

Lastly, awareness and education are critical. Conducting events and developing educational programs can significantly enhance the adoption of sustainable practices. Leveraging the expertise of international chains to create comprehensive training materials can ensure that all retailers, regardless of size, have access to the knowledge and tools they need to become more sustainable.

In conclusion, these elements should be taken into consideration throughout the entire project, ensuring that every stakeholder sees value and plays an active role in driving sustainability forward. This collaborative, supportive, and flexible approach will not only enhance sustainability in the retail sector but also contribute to broader environmental and economic goals.

Annex: Funding and market research: Interpretation

Note: This Annex contains a separate Excel files on Funding and Market Research.

Funding research

The Excel sheet titled "National Skills Funding" outlines various national funding sources aimed at supporting skills development relevant to S4R. Among these, the most interesting funding option is the French Skills Investment Plan, which involves an investment of over 15 billion euros. This program provides grants for vocational educational training, ensuring individuals possess the necessary skills and expertise to utilize the product effectively. The sheet emphasizes aligning S4R's offerings with national priorities in skills development, presenting substantial revenue opportunities through government support.

The "Funding for Employees" sheet focuses on identifying funding opportunities that support employee training and development within organizations using S4R. The most compelling option here is the European Social Fund (ESF), which provides grants for training projects aimed at improving employment opportunities and workforce skills. By accessing ESF grants, companies can reduce training costs while ensuring their workforce remains proficient in using S4R, highlighting the importance of continuous learning and professional development.

In the "Individuals" sheet, the emphasis is on funding options available directly to individual users of S4R. The standout option is the Erasmus+ Individual Mobility Grant, which offers financial support for individuals seeking to enhance their skills through international training programs. This funding makes S4R more accessible to a wider audience, promoting individual growth and adoption by empowering users to secure funding for their professional development.

The "EU Bodies" sheet details various European Union funding programs that support projects and initiatives aligned with the goals of S4R. The ESF+ program stands out as the most interesting option, offering significant grants for research and innovation projects that align with EU policies. The strategy aims to secure substantial financial support for the deployment and scaling of S4R, emphasizing the importance of aligning with broader EU frameworks.

In the "Erasmus +" sheet, the focus is on the European Union's Erasmus+ program, which offers funding for education, training, youth, and sport. The most promising option here is the Erasmus+ Policy Experimentation, micro-credentials, which provides financial support for mobility projects that incorporate S4R. This funding enhances the product's reach and impact through international collaborations and educational initiatives, leveraging Erasmus+ funds to support cross-border exchanges and professional development.

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Market Research

The "Large Retailers" sheet explores funding opportunities from major retail companies that might support sustainability and educational projects. The most interesting option is the Carrefour Foundation, which provides grants for projects that promote sustainable development and social inclusion. By securing support from the Carrefour Foundation, the strategy aims to foster partnerships that enhance the visibility and adoption of S4R, aligning with retailers' sustainability goals and expanding the product's market presence. Parallelly, these programmes provide good examples of existing products on the market.

The "Tech cos" sheet focuses on funding opportunities from technology companies interested in innovation and skills development. The standout option is AWS's free cloud computing training program, which aims to provide training to millions of individuals by 2025. This initiative offers a significant opportunity for collaboration, allowing S4R to be integrated into broader technological ecosystems. Leveraging AWS's resources and expertise ensures the sustainability and growth of S4R, aligning with the goal of promoting technological innovation and skills development.

The "HE and VET" provides examples of programs similar to S4R from which we could either inspire or ally ourselves with. Most importantly, they provide examples of prices that could be applicable to this category of product.

Conclusion

The market research indicates a robust landscape of training and upskilling initiatives in the sustainability sector. Key players such as AWS, Microsoft, and Google are investing heavily in AI and cloud computing training, highlighting the sector's trend towards technological advancement. Large retailers like IKEA and SPAR are focusing on AI literacy and comprehensive HR training, respectively, ensuring their workforce remains competitive. Meanwhile, educational institutions provide a variety of courses to cater to different levels of expertise, enhancing the overall skill set available in the market.

This diverse and strategic approach by various entities suggests a strong commitment to sustainability and technological proficiency, creating a competitive yet collaborative environment in the sector.

Quality assurance review

Work Package No/Name	WP6 - Long Term Sustainability Strategy to scale up activities post project
Deliverable Name	D6.1 -Long-term Sustainability Strategy
Partner(s) involvement	**Accenture** **Schuman Associates** **JA Europe**
Submission Deadline (As per Annual Work Plan)	**14.08.2024**

Rate	1	2	3	4	5
Quality Parameter	very low/strongly disagree	low/disagree	moderate/neither nor	high/ agree	very high/strongly agree
1. The work performed corresponds to the requirements and methodological standards of the project.	☐	☐	☐	☐	☒
2. The drafting and structuring of each deliverable include the contribution of all relevant experts.	☐	☐	☐	☐	☒
3. Deliverables use clear and easily understandable language in the text and the design is professional and in line with the project brand identity, guidelines, and document template.	☐	☐	☐	☐	☒
4. The output is in line with the standards adopted by the European Commission.	☐	☐	☐	☐	☒
Name of the WP Leader	**Accenture**				
Submission Date	**14/08/2024**				



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