



SME4DD

Training SMEs for the Digital Decade



Co-funded by the
European Union

Training SMEs for the Digital Decade¹

D4.3 Quality Assurance Plan

Abstract: This document presents the Quality Assurance Plan for the 'Training SMEs for the Digital Decade' (SME4DD) project, with a specific focus on ensuring the quality of both project deliverables and the short courses developed for SMEs. SME4DD addresses the demand for advanced digital skills in Europe, emphasizing Artificial Intelligence, Blockchain, and Cybersecurity. This plan outlines the roles and responsibilities central to quality management, emphasizing continuous monitoring, assessment, and iterative improvement.

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1. Executive Summary

The "Training SMEs for the Digital Decade" (SME4DD) project represents a forward-looking initiative designed to meet the increasing demand for advanced digital skills in Europe. Focused on developing short courses in three key digital technologies - Artificial Intelligence, Blockchain, and Cybersecurity - the project aims to equip small and medium-sized enterprises (SMEs) with the essential capabilities to navigate the evolving digital landscape effectively.

Central to the success of the SME4DD project is the comprehensive integration of quality management, overseen by the Quality Manager (QM) within the framework of Project Management Work Package 4 (WP4). Specifically, Task 4.3 entails the development of the Quality Assurance Plan, which outlines the deployment of distinct quality control procedures. These procedures encompass various quality processes throughout the project's lifecycle, ensuring that all project tasks and deliverables undergo rigorous peer review and revision.

Moreover, to maintain the highest standards in the short-term courses offered by SME4DD partners, both during the development phase and the course roll-out, particular attention within the plan is dedicated to pursuing and maintaining superior course quality. This responsibility lies with the partner leading Work Package 2 (WP2), explicitly devoted to short-course development. Collaborating closely with the Quality Manager, this partner plays a pivotal role in overseeing course content and curricula quality while coordinating and aligning activities among training providers to ensure learning consistency and quality.

The Quality Assurance Plan, as outlined in the following sections, underscores the SME4DD project's steadfast commitment to maintaining quality in all aspects of its execution. All project partners are fully dedicated to adhering to the comprehensive procedures and activities detailed in the plan. Through the diligent implementation of quality management practices, the peer review mechanism, and a dedicated focus on enhancing the short course content quality, the SME4DD project stands poised to make a significant contribution to Europe's digital advancement.

2. Ensuring quality in SME4DD

The primary goal of SME4DD is to develop and deliver tailored short-term training courses, equipping SME professionals with the knowledge and skills needed for digital solutions across various sectors. This specific focus on technology aims to bridge the existing gap in advanced digital skills, thereby enhancing Europe's global competitiveness.

The comprehensive Quality Assurance Plan serves as the foundation for all project activities, deliverables, project management, and final reports. It ensures strict adherence to the project's structured work plan and facilitates effective stakeholder communication. The quality team actively engages with stakeholders, addressing concerns, mitigating risks, and implementing corrective measures.

The role of the Quality Manager (QM) is to define, monitor, and oversee the implementation of the Quality Assurance Plan by all project partners. This includes managing procedures for assessing the quality of project deliverables, with peer reviewers from partner staff actively supporting this process.

Furthermore, quality oversight extends to the development of SME4DD's learning content and formats, which are critical components for training providers. Collaborative efforts with Work Package (WP) Leaders and Task Leaders (TL) enable real-time updates on short-term training course development, facilitating the resolution of emerging challenges related to content quality. This commitment ensures that learning content is carefully crafted to align seamlessly with the project's overarching goal of creating relevant, market-specific SME courses in AI, Cybersecurity, and Blockchain upskilling.

In summary, quality assurance and monitoring are integral aspects of SME4DD's framework. They provide a solid foundation for rigorous oversight, guiding the tracking of achievements, aligning them with the project's timeline, and ensuring their ongoing relevance.

2.1 Quality assurance, monitoring and evaluation strategy

Central to the commitment to quality assurance and control is the meticulous management of SME4DD project deliverables. In close collaboration with the Project Coordinator (PC) and the Project Executive Committee (PEC), the Quality Manager (QM) ensures strict adherence to the agreed-upon Quality Assurance (QA) procedures. Work Package Leaders (WPL) are responsible for generating deliverables in accordance with predefined specifications and schedules, subject to review and acceptance by the Consortium and the European Commission.

The QM designates two peer reviewers from among the project partners to evaluate each deliverable. These peer reviewers comprehensively assess the quality of each deliverable, including its content, presentation, comprehensiveness, and alignment with the Grant Agreement. Formal approval of deliverables takes place during General Assembly (GEA) meetings convened by the Consortium.

Furthermore, the QM is entrusted with establishing and overseeing quality assurance and monitoring procedures. These encompass the timely completion and review of technical achievements, including deliverables and milestones, as stipulated in the Grant Agreement. The QM also ensures the maintenance of high-quality learning content for short-term courses. Collaboration with relevant Work Package (WP) Leaders and Task Leaders enables continuous monitoring of short course development and prompt resolution of any issues that may arise.

The QM ensures that periodic activity reports, deliverables, management reports, and final project reports meet the high-quality standards outlined in the work plan. Additionally, the QM informs the PEC of ongoing quality processes and promptly raises any issues requiring corrective action. When needed, the QM participates in PEC meetings and reports directly to the GEA.

The establishment of an effective quality monitoring system allows for the continuous tracking of project phases, ensuring that the SME4DD project progresses as planned and facilitating proactive issue resolution. This quality control mechanism oversees the production of project deliverables and learning content, leveraging the expertise and oversight of the QM.

The procedure for preparing deliverables and producing learning content is agreed upon at the project's outset. Each project deliverable and piece of learning content undergo a thorough review by the QM before submission or publication.

2.2 Quality management approach

Quality management ensures the consistent achievement of the desired level of quality in all SME4DD project outputs. The fundamental components of the quality management plan encompass project outputs and processes, aligning them with expected quality standards and stakeholder expectations. The structure and procedures for quality management should:

- Be tailored to suit the project's objectives and complexity,
- Avoid imposing excessive time commitments,
- Safeguard the project's flexibility.

2.3 Quality management framework

The quality management process within the SME4DD project is designed to adhere to four fundamental requirements, each playing a pivotal role in ensuring the project's success.

1. **Usefulness:** This requirement involves the establishment of clear and well-defined objectives for evaluating project outcomes. By setting specific goals for assessment, the project ensures that the evaluation process serves a meaningful purpose, guiding decisions and improvements.
2. **Feasibility:** Accurate planning of methods, timeframes, and costs is essential for the successful implementation of quality management strategies. Ensuring that these elements are carefully considered and aligned enhances the project's ability to maintain standards effectively.
3. **Fairness:** Upholding the principle of fairness involves demonstrating respect for all aspects being evaluated. Fairness ensures that the evaluation process is impartial and unbiased and considers all relevant factors, fostering stakeholder trust.
4. **Accuracy:** The accuracy requirement demands producing valid and precise results pertaining to evaluation questions, objectives, and targets. By ensuring that evaluation findings are credible and reliable, the project can make informed decisions and improvements based on accurate insights.

These four fundamental requirements collectively form the cornerstone of the quality management process in the SME4DD project. Addressing each aspect, the project aims to ensure that its quality management efforts are purposeful, well-planned, impartial, and underpinned by reliable data.

2.4 Purpose of the quality management

Building upon the foundation of the previously outlined quality management framework, the SME4DD Quality Assurance Plan is a robust mechanism to ensure that activities align with agreed-upon timelines and quality standards while fostering a project environment characterized by continuous improvement.

Specifically, quality management within the SME4DD project serves to achieve the following objectives:

- **Building confidence in work quality:** By outlining the project's execution, measurement, monitoring, and accountability, the plan fosters confidence in the Consortium's work quality.
- **Defining roles and responsibilities:** The plan establishes clear roles and responsibilities within the review process, taking into consideration the skill sets necessary to manage project complexities and risks.
- **Structured issue resolution:** It provides a structured approach for identifying and addressing changes and issues, including reporting mechanisms.
- **Proactive issue mitigation:** The plan underscores the significance of proactive measures, facilitated through regular project meetings (monthly or more frequent as appropriate), to identify and address potential issues early on, preventing them from evolving into obstacles that could hinder the achievement of project objectives. Additionally, the plan emphasizes the importance of revisiting the risk assessment bi-annually, ensuring that the understanding of potential risks remains current. In the spirit of transparency and collaboration, identified risks are shared openly among the consortium partners. Any necessary new mitigation measures will be incorporated into the project as it progresses.
- **Ensuring output excellence:** The plan specifies the content, format, sign-off process, review process, and responsibilities for each output, ensuring uniformity and quality.

- **Technical and quality fulfilment:** It highlights the strategies used to fulfil technical and quality requirements, reinforcing the project's commitment to excellence.
- **Course Quality Assurance:** Furthermore, the plan extends its scope to address how quality is ensured within the design of different short courses under SME4DD, seamlessly integrating the commitment to quality across all project facets.

By aligning these objectives with the quality management framework, the SME4DD Quality Assurance Plan forms a cohesive strategy aimed at fostering exceptional outcomes and continuous enhancement.

2.5 Risk management strategy

Through regular work package meetings and regular consultations cross, SME4DD partners will establish an effective quality monitoring system from the early stages of the project. This system will allow:

1. to monitor the phases of the project,
2. to assess if the project is proceeding as planned, and
3. to proactively anticipate and address any issues instead of reactive problem-solving.

The Project Manager will maintain continuous oversight of resources and technical progress, comparing them against the plans outlined in the technical and financial annexes to the EC Grant Agreement. When necessary, corrective actions will be initiated. Deviations in costs, resources, and schedules will be carefully examined to identify root causes, which will be recorded and leveraged for ongoing improvement. Any potential impact of schedule changes on the project's budget, resources, and work quality will be promptly accessed and communicated to the Project Coordinator.

Key areas of potential risks will be closely monitored, as follows:

- Operations:
 - o Identifying internal and external obstacles (e.g., the COVID-19 pandemic) that may hinder the achievement of WP objectives and taking necessary actions to overcome these barriers.
 - o Detecting any adjustments required in human resources and other time or budget allocations needed to perform the work that should be adjusted to reach the interim objectives.
- Budget:
 - o Identifying and mitigating the consequences of any new budget demand due to unexpected changes in the environment and/or alterations in partners' planned cost allocations.
- Time/Scheduling:
 - o Identifying any changes or delays in the production of deliverables and assessing their impact on the overall project deliverables schedule.
 - o Recognising organisational changes involved in dealing efficiently with any delays.
 - o Managing any possible amendment needed to modify a project-related result or event.

- Identifying any changes or delays in the production of deliverables and assessing their impact on the overall project deliverables schedule. Recognizing and efficiently managing organizational changes necessitated by any delays or amendments required to modify project-related outcomes or events.
- Performance and competencies:
 - Identifying underperforming partners, proposing solutions, and addressing changes in key personnel involved in tasks to ensure project deadlines are met.
- Consortium composition:
 - Addressing situations where a partner faces challenges in delivering the planned work.

Each WP Leader will maintain ongoing assessments of these risks and promptly communicate early warning signs to the Project Manager. Mitigation strategies for specific risks will be discussed and determined, with the mode of communication chosen based on the importance of the issue (virtual call, ad-hoc or regular meetings). As appropriate, the PEC will take the final decision regarding actions, drawing on the contingency planning designed for the project.

2.6 Document management process

Building upon the quality management framework and the outlined purpose of quality management, the SME4DD project implements a comprehensive document management process to ensure the quality of project outcomes, particularly contractual deliverables.

- **Document Storage:** The Project Coordinator will establish a dedicated SME4DD project repository to facilitate effective document management. This repository will be accessible to all consortium members and will house common project information and shareable documents, structured according to the different work packages and other project documentation. Work package leaders are responsible for organising documents within their respective work packages, while deliverable leaders will oversee document maintenance. All partners contributing to a document are responsible for document maintenance through instructions provided by the deliverable leader.
- **Administrative Documents:** The repository will also include administrative documents related to the consortium agreement, submitted deliverables, and all project-related documents, including templates and reference materials.
- **Document Language:** English is designated as the official language for Digital Europe projects. Consequently, all project documents must be drafted in English, adhering to appropriate grammar rules and a formal language style. Exceptions to this rule may be considered for dissemination and promotional

materials intended for specific SME4DD geographies - Sweden, Hungary, France, and Italy - where translation into local languages may be considered.

2.7 Deliverables production

Guidelines for creating all SME4DD deliverables are as follows:

- **Adherence to template format:** Conform to the prescribed project templates, including specified font sizes and styles for various text hierarchies, line spacing, indentation, margins, and overall layout.
- **Clarity of text and visuals:** Ensure that all textual and visual components are distinctly legible and readily understandable.
- **Consistency in graphical presentation:** Maintain uniformity with the project's visual identity (e.g. logo) across all content.
- **Integration of Visual Elements:** Incorporate relevant images and diagrams judiciously to represent concepts and enhance comprehension visually.
- **Strategic employment of headings:** Deploy distinct heading levels strategically to emphasize pivotal information and improve flow within the text. Organize the content appropriately by incorporating varying text levels and sub-headings to facilitate a coherent progression.
- **Facilitation of cross-references:** Integrate cross-references while referring to other sections, ensuring coherence and connectivity throughout the content.
- **Emphasis on active voice:** Employ the active voice predominantly to amplify content clarity and directness.
- **Effective use of bulleted and numbered lists:** Leverage bullet points and numbered lists effectively to capture attention, structure content, and facilitate reading.

2.8 Deliverables review

The project deliverables are a central focus of quality assurance and control within the project. The appointed Quality Manager is accountable to the General Assembly (GEA) and works closely with the Project Coordinator (PC) and Project Executive Committee (PEC), responsible for ensuring adherence to agreed quality assurance procedures. Each Work Package (WP) Leader is responsible for generating deliverables according to specifications and schedules, with deliverables subject to review and acceptance by the Consortium and the European Commission (EC).

The deliverable review process, illustrated in Figure 1, is designed to elevate the quality of project outputs and minimize the risk of less favourable assessments.

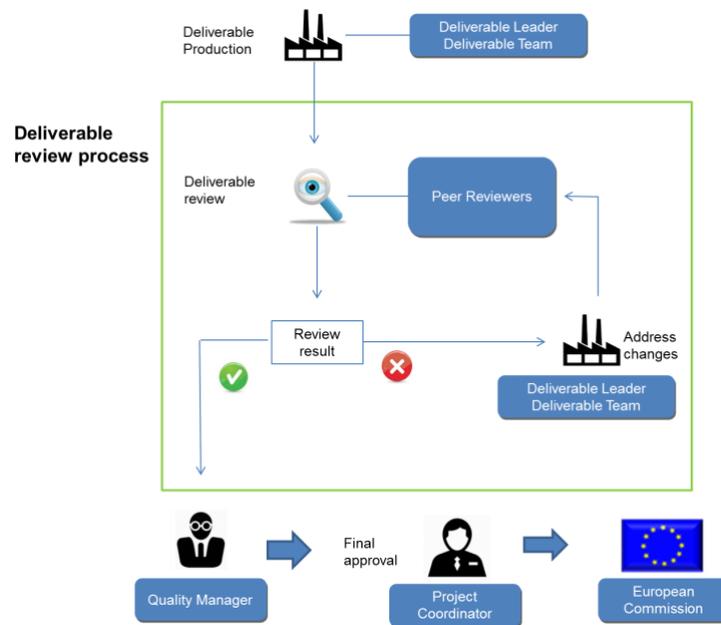


Figure 1: Deliverable Review Process

The project's electronic repository will be employed for the document exchange during the review process. The deliverable review process starts once the final draft is prepared. To ensure a comprehensive evaluation and provide ample time for the deliverable leader to incorporate comments and input, the deliverable review process begins at least one month before the official submission date.

Deliverable submission deadlines and upcoming peer reviews are announced and emphasized during Work Package meetings, particularly within the Work Package dedicated to project management (WP4).

2.8.1 Internal Review Planning

The project's Quality Manager initiates the deliverable review process using an internal review planning table, which was introduced to the Consortium and obtained approval from all partners during the project's initial phase. The 'Internal Review Planning' (Figure 2) provides a structured overview of the SME4DD review process and outlines a systematic approach to enhancing project outputs. This planning tool includes essential information about the deliverables, such as their due dates and contributors, and designates two partner organizations to serve as peer reviewers for each deliverable.

Peer reviewers are selected based on specific criteria, when applicable:

- The allocation of deliverables to a partner organization is proportionate to the organization's workload within the project.

- Partner organisations entrusted with the deliverable review should not have direct involvement in the specific deliverable but must possess substantial expertise in the deliverable's domain.
- Reviewing partner organizations should possess a foundational understanding of the project, preferably involving individuals associated with the project but not directly participating in the task and deliverable development.

The table that follows includes information regarding the lead partner per deliverable, as well as the partners responsible for the review process. The selection of the partners responsible for the revision was based on the principle to include one ecosystem representative and a training delivery representative, to ensure that all deliverables are sound and comprehensive representation of the two principle groups of stakeholders.

Del. No	Deliverable name	Deliverable leader	Del. due date	Main contributors	Internal Reviewers	
					Ecosystem representative	Training representative
D1.1	Report on upskilling needs in AI, Blockchain and Cybersecurity in Europe	KIFU	9	EITD; Assintel	INRIA	TAG
D2.1	First year report on short- term training programmes results	BME	12	TAG, INRIA, BME	EITD	KIFU
D2.2	Second year report on short- term training programmes results	INRIA	24	TAG, INRIA, BME	EITD	Assintel
D2.3	Final report on short- term training programmes results	HIAB	36	TAG, INRIA, BME	EITD	KIFU
D2.4	Report on the design and pilot deployment of the professional master programme on AI, Blockchain and Cybersecurity	EITD	36	EITD	KIFU	TAG
D3.1	Communication and Dissemination Plan	EITD	6	EITD, TAG	Assintel	BME
D3.2	First year report on the marketing, communication and and dissemination activities	EITD	12	EITD, TAG	Assintel	BME
D3.3	Second year report on the marketing, communication and and dissemination activities	TAG	24	EITD, TAG	INRIA	BME
D3.4	Final report on the marketing, communication and and dissemination activities	EITD	36	EITD, TAG	INRIA	Assintel
D4.1	Data Management Plan	EITD	6	EITD	INRIA	TAG
D4.2	Project Management Handbook	EITD	6	EITD	KIFU	INRIA
D4.3	Quality Assurance Methodology	HIAB	9	EITD	Assintel	TAG

- **Table 1: Internal Review Planning**

All partners contribute experts to support the peer-review process. Upon receiving a deliverable, peer reviewers evaluate its overall quality, including content, presentation, comprehensiveness, and alignment with the Grant Agreement requirements. Formal approval by the Consortium is documented during a GEA meeting.

2.8.2 Roles and responsibilities

The roles and responsibilities within the deliverable review process can be seen in the following table (Figure 3):

ROLE	RESPONSIBILITIES
Quality Manager (QM)	<p>Responsible for creating and implementing the Quality Plan and managing risk.</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> - Supervise the deliverable review process from start to finish, including establishing the internal review matrix, review process, and relevant timeline. - Support the peer reviewers and the deliverable leader during the deliverable review process. - Perform a final formatting review and produce the final version to be sent to the Project Coordinator for formal approval and release to the EC. - Ensure that the learning content used by the training providers is of high quality. Keep the relevant Work Package Leaders (WPL) and Task Leaders (TL) updated on the development status of the short-term training programmes from each training provider and raise any issues requiring urgent action. - Before submission or publication, the QM reviews each project deliverable and learning content. When appropriate, the document/material will also undergo an English check by a native speaker.
Work Package Leaders (WPL)	<p>Responsible for managing their Work Package (WP) as a self-contained entity and interfacing with other WPs through the Project Executive Committee (PEC), Work Package Leaders (WPLs) coordinate, monitor, and assess the progress of the WP to ensure that output performance, budget, and timelines are met. Their responsibilities include:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> - Producing project deliverables according to defined quality processes, including review, modification, and approval. - Identifying risks to report to the Project Manager and complying with risk mitigation plans. - Reporting quality issues and status to the Quality Manager. - Achieving the technical objectives of the project in their domain. - Ensuring conformance of WP results with the requirements of succeeding work packages. - Maintaining the confidentiality of processes and results, as appropriate.
Peer Reviewers (PR)	<p>Review and check the documents for overall content quality, presentation, comprehensiveness, and adherence to the requirements stipulated in the Grant Agreement. The Consortium's formal deliverable approval is documented during a General Assembly meeting.</p>

Table 2- Roles and Responsibilities on Deliverable Review

3. Elevating learning content

SME4DD conducts a comprehensive analysis within the Upskilling Needs of SMEs Work Package (WP1). This analysis aims to gather data on SME digital skills, with a specific focus on three technology areas. It involves surveying existing training gaps, pinpointing particular needs, and understanding the underlying challenges.

Building upon the findings from WP1 and the Short-Term Training Programmes Work Package (WP2), the project will thereon integrate the ESCO (European Skills, Competencies, Qualifications, and Occupations) profiles into the analysis. This integration ensures alignment with European standards and identifies core competencies essential for effective digital upskilling. In line with SME4DD's overarching project quality assurance, this approach ensures that the content created for short-term training courses is rigorously assessed and refined to meet the identified skill gaps and specific needs of SME professionals. Consequently, the content resulting from this process aims to be well-informed, relevant, and directly addresses the target audience's demands. This significantly enhances the quality and efficacy of the short-course learning content and its delivery.

The outcomes of the work carried out subsequently in WP1 and WP2 lay the foundation for subsequent project stages. These work packages collectively shape the development of tailored short-term training courses, designed to address skill gaps and cater to the specific needs of SME professionals, all in line with SME4DD's overarching project quality assurance.

3.1 Data-driven foundation: analysing SME digital skills

The development of short courses within the SME4DD project is grounded in a data-driven approach, emphasising quality and tailored precision to meet the needs of their intended beneficiaries and future participants – the target audience of the short courses.

Through an extensive desk research process in WP1, where data is collected with the utmost respect for privacy and confidentiality, valuable insights are gained into distinct SME digital skill gaps and digitalisation requirements. This research allows for the effective identification and prioritization of target audiences. Moreover, this approach takes into account the ESCO roles at both the individual and organizational levels, ensuring a holistic understanding of skill requirements. By aligning course structures and learning formats with the specific needs of SMEs, a more tailored and impactful learning experience can be delivered.

This data-driven approach guarantees that the short courses developed within the SME4DD project are finely tuned to bridge skill gaps and support the digital upskilling of SME professionals, all while maintaining the standards of data privacy and security during the desk research process.

3.2 Targeting training gaps: Insights and ESCO integration

To effectively address training gaps and short courses that are finely tuned to meet the existing and evolving needs of SME professionals, insights from WP1 will integrate the knowledge drawn from short-course providers working in WP2 while aligning it with European standards through ESCO profiles.

The analysis seeks answers to essential questions concerning the target audience:

- **What is the level of digitisation among SMEs?** This question assesses the extent to which SMEs have embraced digital technologies in their operations and processes.
- **What are the obstacles hindering technology adoption among SMEs?** The exploration delves into the challenges and barriers that prevent SMEs from effectively adopting and integrating technology solutions into their business operations.
- **What are the characteristics of teaching models most suitable for SMEs?** Specific attributes and features that make teaching and training approaches effective and well-suited to the unique context of SMEs are identified.

Central to this approach is the importance of data, serving as a guiding compass for navigating the complexities of SME digital skills development. The analysis takes into account the perceived significance of collected data in driving SME business growth and competitiveness through technology adoption. It also sheds light on the varying levels of awareness and maturity within these companies in this context. Subsequently, this data provides valuable insights, use cases, and models to address identified business needs and associated technology solutions.

Furthermore, the evaluation encompasses the current business status of SMEs and their future positioning within AI, blockchain and cybersecurity. These findings inform ongoing updates to learning objectives, ensuring alignment with ESCO profiles and developing standardized skill sets. These standardized skill sets, in turn, enable precise evaluation and assessment of the courses offered, ensuring that training courses consistently meet the intended quality standards and are scalable to serve the evolving needs of SME professionals.

3.3 Crafting training adapted to SME audience

When integrating the data-driven insights, the approach to crafting short courses adapted for SMEs encompasses the following key elements:

- **Designing learning outcomes (Impact):** Learning outcomes of short courses are meticulously structured to ensure a meaningful impact, driven by an understanding of the digital skills landscape and the specific implications for the target audience.

- **Combination of material, experts, methods, and formats:** A comprehensive blend of materials, industry expertise, teaching methods, and flexible formats is curated to create well-rounded training short courses adapted to the target audience.
- **Pre-session, during-session, and post-session learning:** Short courses provide value at every stage, offering pre-session materials, preparation and guidance, class delivery including interactive sessions, and post-session resources to reinforce learning.
- **Optimizing session conditions:** Careful consideration is given to conditions of course delivery, ensuring an ideal learning environment (e.g., physical setup, technological infrastructure, content accessibility, instructor expertise) that maximizes participant success.

3.4 Developing sustainable short courses

The process of ensuring short course quality is ongoing and dynamic, focusing on evolutionary perspectives and market relevance. This includes:

- **Participant feedback:** Emphasis is to be placed on gathering feedback directly from participants through surveys, focus groups, and individual assessments. Their perspectives on course content, delivery, and overall learning experiences are actively sought. This direct input from SME participants provides valuable insights into their needs, challenges, and expectations, allowing for the fine-tuning of short courses for maximum relevance and impact.
- **Continuous evaluation of learnings by course providers:** Systematic evaluation, regular assessments, self-evaluation, updates of short course curriculum, course materials and methods to reflect evolving industry trends and learner needs.
- **Evaluation schemes and quality indicators:** Establishing and implementing a robust system for assessing the processes, outcomes, and overall impact of short courses, with an emphasis on participant development and meeting the learning needs of SMEs.

This approach ensures the sustainability and long-term relevance of the short courses, which is integral to the objective of developing a pilot professional master programme, a key milestone in the SME4DD project. Ongoing evaluation and quality assessments of individual courses will provide the data and insights required to curate the best content from the three verticals on AI, Blockchain, and Cybersecurity. This pilot program is planned to be implemented before the project's conclusion, with the ultimate goal of establishing a professional master programme at the EU level that will persist beyond SME4DD project completion. Another objective within the project, particularly WP2, is to associate the master programme with an official certification scheme to enhance its quality and industry recognition.

Furthermore, to maximize the impact of the short courses and ensure their continued relevance and adaptability to the evolving needs of SME professionals, the following strategies and initiatives will be implemented:

- **Continuous engagement with SME participants:** Maintaining regular contact with short course participants, providing ongoing support, and offering valuable resources to ensure the lasting impact of their training.
- **Assessment of organisational benefits:** Continuous monitoring of SMEs that invest in the short courses, tracking the tangible benefits of the training, such as improved employee skills translating into growth, while assessing how these benefits contribute to the overall return on investment. This assessment ensures that the content of short courses continues to be closely aligned with the evolving needs of SMEs in terms of digital uptake and their perceived development objectives.
- **Active alumni involvement:** Dedicate efforts to establish an alumni network from the outset of the short course delivery. Over time, this long-term engagement nurtures a strong sense of community, promotes collaborations, and ensures the ongoing sustainability and relevance of short courses among SMEs.