

DIHUB – Digital Innovation Hub Model

Cluster of interconnected nodes for innovation development, education, and collaborative projects

20.5.2022



DIHUB

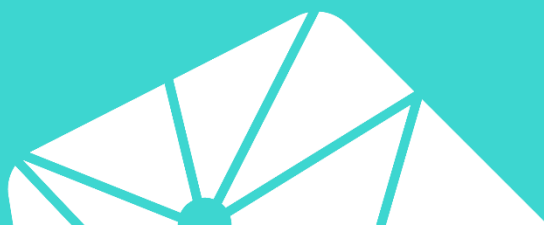


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DIGITAL INNOVATION HUB FOR CLOUD-BASED SERVICES



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DIHUB

1. Introduction

The Digital Innovation Hub for Cloud-Based Services - DIHUB – is an EU-funded project under the ERASMUS+, Key Action 2, and Sector Skills Alliances programmes. The main aim of the DIHUB is to provide a European-wide, transnational, interconnected service platform and network for cloud-based services and technologies. Five European countries are working together to develop a hub model of clustered nodes. These hubs will be learning and development environments for VET students and a service development environment for companies to update their future, their knowhow, skills and digital service creation.

The purpose of this document is to explain the DIHUB model. It contains the definition of the hub, a description of the hub model and of the processes and of the provision of services using an online platform, a plan for attracting customers, and an analysis of sustainability issues and of the dissemination of the hub.

This deliverable is part of the WP2.

2. Definition of the DIHUB

2.1. Core elements of the DIHUB

The DIHUB is a European wide service platform for cloud-based services designed for students, teachers, coaches and small and medium-sized enterprises (SMEs). The DIHUB is a Business hub for speeding up cloud-based digital innovations for SMEs (from micro innovations to larger ones).

The core elements of the DIHUB are:

- **Collaboration:** students, VET/Education providers and businesses collaborating through the platform to develop innovative cloud-based services.
- **A training program and a set of materials:** the DIHUB Training program, for either formal or informal training, encompasses themes related to cloud-based services, artificial intelligence and SCRUM methodologies.
- **Service development support for SMEs:** the DIHUB process corresponds to the service needs of SMEs allowing them to introduce or increase the use of cloud-based solutions to improve their business.

The DIHUB is based on VET providers' cloud-based digital innovations services for SMEs. These services are also promoted in the DIHUB digital service platform. The VET providers own the service process, which is carried out in collaboration with other stakeholders. The DIHUB Service Platform has a genuine connection to formal (EQF 4-7) and informal training programmes in the field. This has been guaranteed by a DACUM-analysis that maps the



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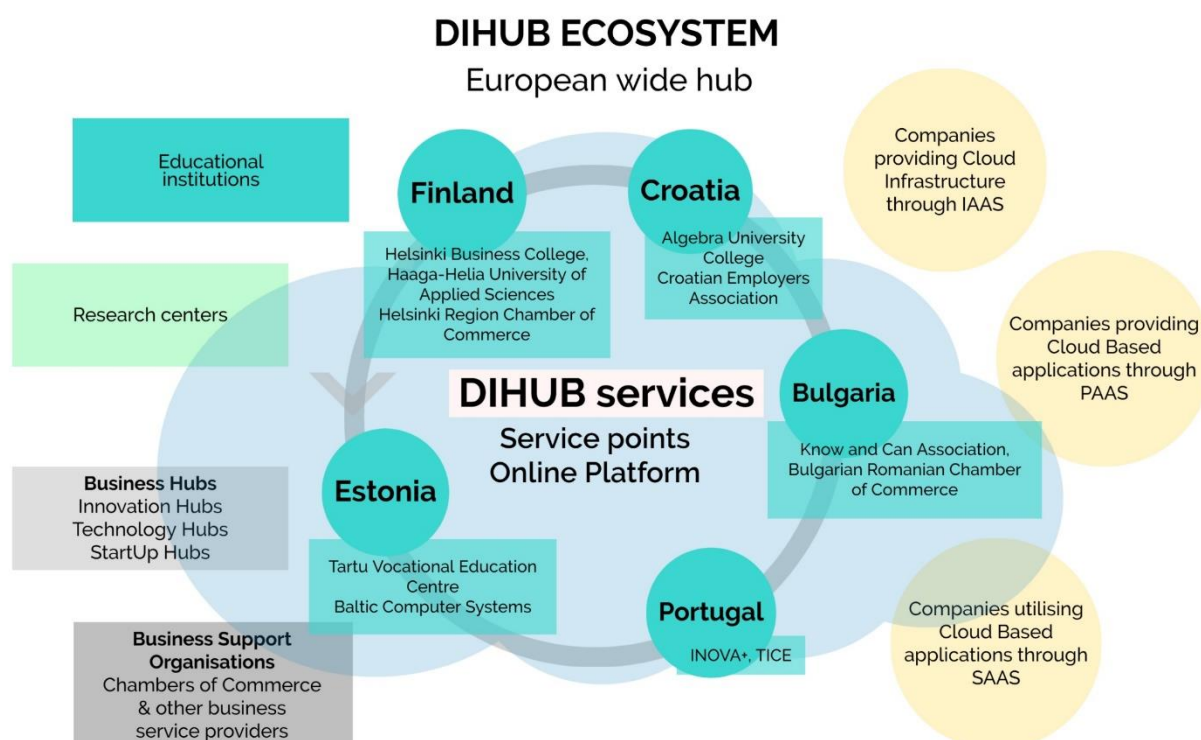
core skills in cloud technology and services. Based on the DACUM-analysis, the curriculum and the materials were created for the EQF-level 6 and 4. The DACUM-analysis also succeeded to introducing two new skills into European ESCO classification.

2.2. Cluster of interconnected nodes (sub hubs)

Originally, the DIHUB consisted of five interconnected nodes originating from the Erasmus+ project under the European initiative Centres of Vocational Excellence. These interconnected nodes or sub hubs are located in Bulgaria, Croatia, Estonia, Finland and Portugal, where the 11 partners of the DIHUB project are based. After piloting the DIHUB services and activities, the DIHUB will be expanded to other VET providers and stakeholders in Europe to support local and European innovations through cloud-based solutions.

2.3. The core stakeholders of the DIHUB –service platform

The DIHUB project partners and other VET providers, companies, and business support organisations facilitate DIHUB development and provision of services to support the adoption of cloud-based solutions. The core stakeholders of the DIHUB are illustrated in the diagram below. There is a broader stakeholder analysis of the European and the project countries level in Annex (A1_P_SME Surveys in five partner countries).



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Diagram 1. The core stakeholders of the DIHUB service platform

As the DIHUB is further developed, our aim is to engage all the types of relevant stakeholders in a Digital Innovation Hub as highlighted by JRC: *“A DIH is a regional multi-partner cooperation (including organizations like RTOs, universities, industry associations, chambers of commerce, incubator/accelerators, regional development agencies and even governments) and can also have strong linkages with service providers outside of their region supporting companies with access to their services”*.

3. The DIHUB model

3.1. Context and goals of the DIHUB

The European Council Recommendation (24th of November 2020) on vocational education and training (VET) for sustainable competitiveness, social fairness and resilience (VET Recommendation) promotes Centres of Vocational Excellence (COVE) as world-class reference points for training in specific areas for both initial training and continuing up-skilling and re-skilling.

Centres of Vocational Excellence act as catalysts for local business investment. They support recovery, green and digital transitions, European and regional innovation and smart specialisation strategies and development of vocational education and training (EQF levels 3-4). This includes higher qualification levels (EQF levels 5-8) which are in line with the national context. They also provide innovative services, such as clusters and business incubators for start-ups and technology innovation for SMEs as well as innovative reskilling solutions for workers at the risk of redundancy.

The DIHUB project strives to take the Council recommendation into account, and it aims at being a world-class reference point for training in the field of cloud-based services for both initial training and continuing up-skilling and re-skilling. The DIHUB services strive for continuous improvement towards excellence as one of its goals set for 2030.

The DIHUB utilizes the recommendations and guidelines for Digital Innovation Hubs (DIHs) as policy instruments to boost digitalisation in SMEs (A practical handbook & good practices for regional/national policy makers and DIH managers).

The creation of international networks of cloud service providers and their users is also a priority of the DIHUB. As a starting point, the pooling of knowledge and skills from five European countries creates different perspectives and has the creative potential to solve challenges from smaller up to large-scale and complex problems in cloud-based solutions.



The goals of the DIHUB are:

- Contributing the results of its activities to European VET policy targets
- Strengthen the role of the VET providers as key players in the European innovation ecosystem by:
 - *enhancing the development of an innovation culture, mind-set, and processes for VET providers and SMEs*
 - *fostering cloud-based service innovation in SMEs through business cases associated with VET programmes (Work-Based Learning), thus providing “test before invest” services*
- Increasing awareness and understanding of the cloud-based service ecosystem for all stakeholders at the European, national and local level by:
 - *building the DIHUB community*
 - *describing and updating the cloud-based service ecosystem*
 - *strengthening stakeholder collaboration*
 - *enhancing the awareness of the cloud-based service ecosystem, stakeholder set up, and services available for cloud-based service development*
- Creating a strong client-friendly approach by providing services that respond to the needs of SMEs and other organisations
 - *Continuously updated curricula based on a DACUM-analysis*
 - *Continuous service development for learners, VET providers and SMEs (One stop-service)*
- Answering the need for change and development in VET organisations towards service orientation based on the assumptions that:
 - *development and service activities must be flexible, customer- and working-life-oriented, able to respond regionally to the needs of working life and rapidly changing structural and technological (digitalisation) change*
 - *the quality and level of services of VET providers can and should be improved*
 - *one can influence the changing role of the teacher to become coach/mentor in customer relations*



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- Strengthening systematic co-operation with SMEs by:
 - *creating the customer journey for SMEs in such a way that SMEs can be part of the process from assessing their needs and challenges to accessing relevant skills, services, and funding.*
 - *fostering start-ups and developing mature SMEs so that they can utilize cloud-based solutions*

- Increasing awareness of the benefits of collaboration and of using external services by other stakeholders (either free of charge or market based)

- Contributing to excellence of VET through a mature DIHUB service process that includes mechanisms for:
 - *increasing awareness, understanding and usability of DIHUB services*
 - *how learners, VET providers, and SMEs can achieve the best possible outcomes and practices in developing cloud-based services*
 - *Implementing a quality assurance system for the DIHUB based on EQAVET principles for reaching excellence*



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3.2. Service elements and processes in the DIHUB

The Hub serves four customer groups: *learners*, *VET providers*, *SMEs*, and different *stakeholders*. In this chapter, we describe all customer groups in more detail.

Learners are the educational target group of the hub. They can be students at different educational levels (in formal and/or informal education) as well as employees of SMEs. These customers are looking for training programs through which they can enhance their knowledge and skills. They may also be looking for jobs or seeking to establish a company. The hub provides several levels of cloud training for this particular customer group. These services not only include training for hard skills related to cloud technologies, but also for soft ones.

VET providers are looking for ways to train teachers and learners and to enhance their skills and competences. These customers need development and innovation services to support training programs. They also need to collaborate and co-create with SME's for making cloud-based innovations possible. VET providers are the owners of the DIHUB service process.

The third customer group, **SMEs**, can also benefit from the full range of educational services as they are also looking for cloud-based solutions and ways to improve the skills and competence of their employees. SMEs may also be recruiting new employees who have the competences and skills required. To meet these needs, the hub provides a possibility for direct contacts and talent recruitment. This service affects the labour market and gives SMEs a direct access to highly qualified staff for various forms of employment.

Different stakeholders are the fourth and final customer group. They consist of technology providers, chambers of commerce, ministries, and clusters, among others. Their aim is to support DIHUB service processes. These stakeholders are a very important group as they contribute to the core processes in many ways and enlarge the DIHUB community.

All of the customer groups communicate with each other. Networking and sharing play an essential role in the DIHUB. Cloud service experts, companies and various stakeholders support these services and processes through mentoring, consulting, and recruitment.

The DIHUB customer needs and the support services are described in diagram 2 below:

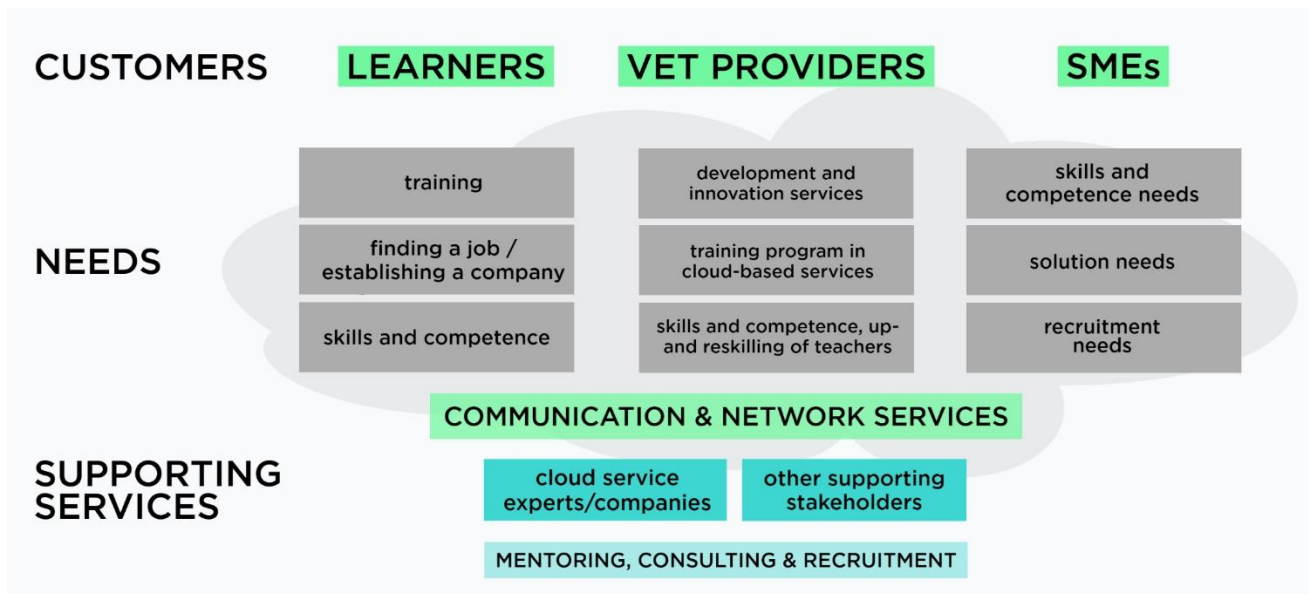


Diagram 2. Service needs in the DIHUB

The service process is illustrated in diagram 3 below.

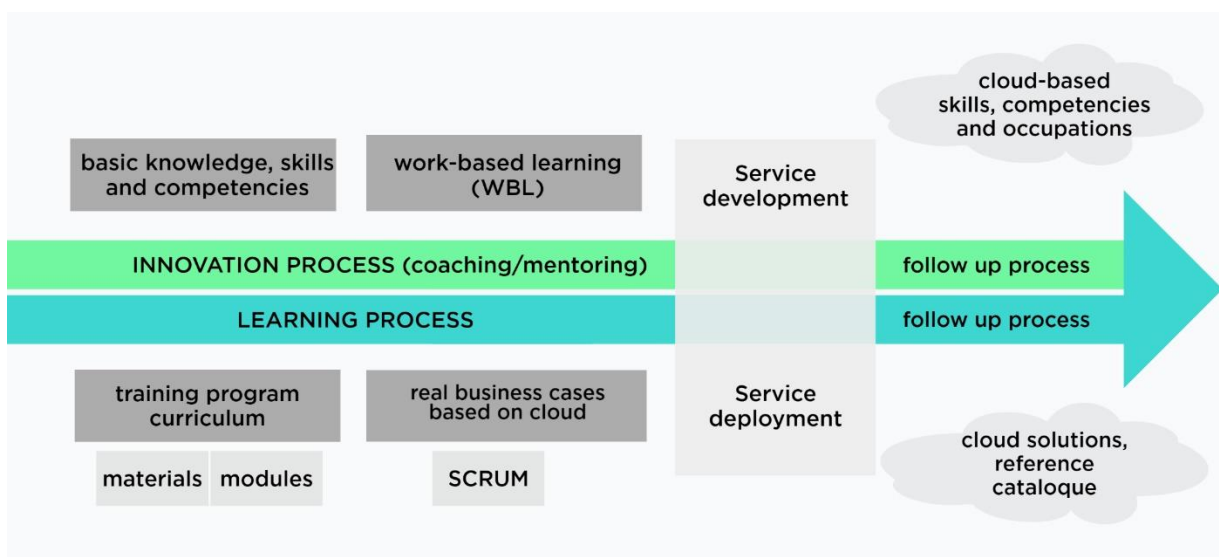


Diagram 3. The DIHUB service process

VET providers own the DIHUB core service process. They provide the skills and competencies needed for cloud-based service creation by offering sophisticated training programs where work-based learning is connected to genuine business cases. This makes it possible to create either small or large new innovations for SME's.

In this process, VET providers must provide continuous service development in order to respond to the needs of customers; trainees, teachers/coaches/mentors and SMEs. VET providers should be able to provide these services at all times. These processes need to be incorporated in their processes (e.g. recruitment services) as an additional and necessary



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part. In most cases, VET providers need to strengthen their service structure. This is especially crucial when involving SMEs in an active role in the process. As the DIHUB develops, the necessary services will be a part of the DIHUB service structure (in a digital online service platform).

When the previous conditions just mentioned are fulfilled, new cloud related skills are taught and developed and new competencies and new innovative occupations are created. As a result, cloud-based solutions of SMEs are taken to the next level, and they also get access to talent.

3.3. The Digital Innovation process in cloud-based services

The digital innovation process in cloud-based services is illustrated below:



The core stakeholders in the DIHUB process are teachers, coaches, students, employers, and DIHUB & VET providers. They all have an important role in the digital innovation process.

Supervising **teachers, coaches and mentors** plan and implement international DIHUB training, and they are responsible for guiding and coaching student. They support students in technical and content-related issues. They lead the project and solve any challenges that may arise (incl. acquisition of external expertise, consulting). They also develop their own skills in a business environment.

Students are able combine working and studying, and they gain valuable work and project experience in real business case challenges. Students are given the chance to develop their



DIHUB

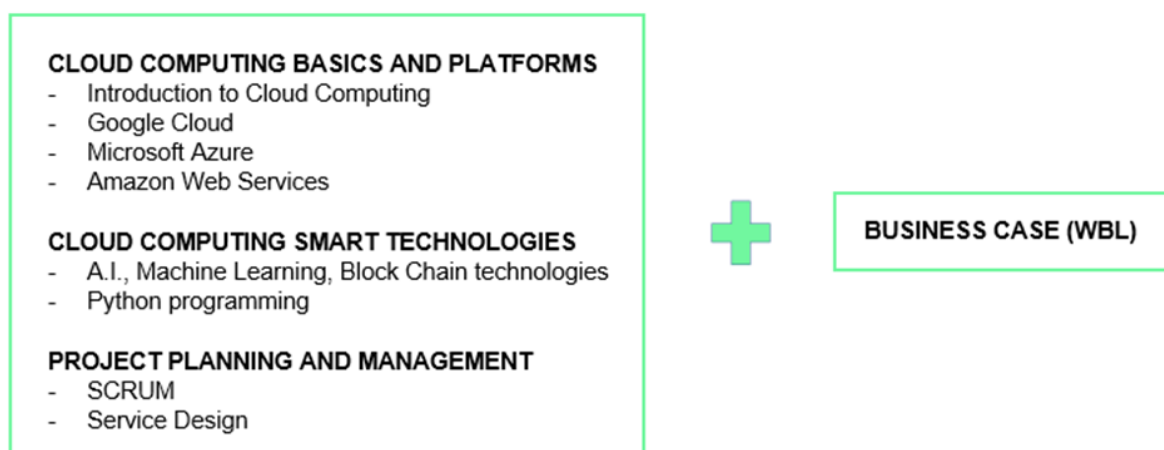
own knowledge and problem-solving skills while having access to a network of experts in the field.

Employers, in turn, make the development project possible. They are responsible for guidance in the workplace and they support and make project continuity possible. Employers get the latest information on technological developments.

3.4. The training programme

The DIHUB **training programme** proposed by the DIHUB project application consists of 21 day live/online learning modules and a real business case, which can take 100-130 days. After testing this concept through two pilots in the five participating countries of the DIHUB, a jointly produced curriculum has been made available. In it, the results of the DACUM analysis and the feedback from pilots were taken into account.

Training Program



The training program can be regarded as a common reference for all VET providers for further development of formal and informal training in the field of cloud technologies. The aim is to match the content and the learning methodology with already existing formal and informal curriculums to enable VET providers to teach the latest skills and competencies needed in the job market. At the same time, innovations (either small or large ones) are being created for cloud-based services of SMEs.

Since the business ecosystem and cloud technology develop rapidly, the training program is renewed constantly. Through actual business cases, which are firmly rooted in reality, it is also possible to naturally develop the training program. This kind of a continuously updated curriculum is vital for the VET providers because it enables them to teach the latest skills and competencies in this growing field of industry. The finalised jointly produced curriculum is described in Annex WP3_D3.1.-P for the EQF level 6 and for the EQF-level 4.



4. The digital service platform

The DIHUB online service platform is a place where students, VET/Education providers/teachers and businesses can collaborate to innovating cloud-based services. This platform extends the services available and gives useful, motivating, and inspirational tools to make the most out of cloud-based innovation ecosystem services.

The DIHUB online service platform can also be regarded a *one-stop service*, meaning that it is a single virtual shared space that offers all participants co-creation possibilities and access to multi-field expertise, partnering, networking, peer-learning, and tutoring. It is essentially “a primus motor” for innovations in the exponentially growing fields of cloud computing and cloud-based AI technologies.

The design of the DIHUB online service platform is illustrated separately in Annex WP2_A2_P. This document has been compiled through design sprint by the core customer groups. The DIHUB online service platform can be accessed through the following web address: dihub.cloud

5. Maintaining and developing the DIHUB services and the platform

The DIHUB is also a service platform for facilitating services and collaboration for all the stakeholders involved and enlarging the DIHUB community. It will grow and develop during the coming years after the project itself has ended.

The coordinator of the project maintains the digital online platform as well as the core services as a part of its service structure. As a VET provider, the coordinator has all the service elements within its own processes. Typically, hubs are run and managed by a dedicated community organisation, but with substantial input and influence from the rest of the community.

The DIHUB facilitates community building by providing a place where different local, national, European, and international partners can come together and address the issues that matter most to them in developing cloud-based services, upskilling and reskilling. The DIHUB can therefore support a focussed community-led approach in the field of cloud technology and services. Initial project partners form the core of the community and are committed to the development of the DIHUB.

The DIHUB provides services for the community, but also by the community. Local partners are involved in making decisions about how services are run, in how training is managed, and also in supporting delivery through volunteering (or paid services).

Community hubs need income to be sustainable and to ensure that they will exist for years to come. A range of income sources is usually required to cover all of the costs for maintaining the hub and running its activities. The core sources of income are following:



- VET providers provide basic funding within ICT programs (which are an integral part of the VET-providers service structure)
- sponsors
- grants
- donations
- selling upgraded services
- applying for various types of project funding for service development

Effective community hubs utilize good ideas and resources within the community and can adapt to changing circumstances.

In the case of DIHUB, the provisions related to the future development and maintenance of the hub with online platform and services have been taken care of in the sustainability plan. It is described separately in Annex WP1 A10_P_Sustainability Plan.

6. Promotion, Dissemination & Community building

6.1. Objectives of promotion and dissemination

The promotion and dissemination of the DIHUB platform is part of the global DIHUB project dissemination strategy. As stated above in this document, the DIHUB platform is a one-stop-shop for all DIHUB stakeholders to interact in and to get hold of the services, skills and innovations they need. Thus, the DIHUB is a bridge between the various stakeholders.

Bearing this in mind, the promotion and dissemination strategy of the DIHUB platform has the following objectives:

- informing the main stakeholders (VET providers, students, SMEs and other relevant stakeholders) about the features and advantages related to cloud-based technologies of the DIHUB;
- showing (through good practices, real cases) how collaboration between these stakeholders can be beneficial for all parties and turn into effective improvements for their organisations and/or individual paths;
- attracting new users to the platform/Hub and encouraging them to use the various tools and to create new content - fostering the enlargement of the community.

The above-mentioned objectives are closely connected to the concept of “content marketing”. By using content marketing, we aim to attract users onto the DIHUB platform. The online content will include blog posts about best practices and previous business cases, descriptions of European and local stakeholders, training materials, among others. In short, we aim to attract customers to the DIHUB by creating valuable online content.



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6.2. Key resources of the DIHUB platform

The way the contents, resources, and tools of the DIHUB platform are displayed and made available to its users is key to successful dissemination of the DIHUB services and to the growth of the community. The DIHUB platform will have a landing page with a presentation of the Hub, its partners, and information about the resources and services available. The landing page will also have a registration/login area which will give access to further content and collaborative tools to connect the stakeholders within the hub.

One of the key features of the DIHUB platform is its **ability to eliminate barriers to using cloud-based technologies for SMEs and students**. For this to happen for both students and SMEs, the platform resources (whether they are part of the platform or just indicated as external links) should be user-friendly, appealing, and allow each user to get hold of what they need. In this sense, the following types of resources should be included in the DIHUB platform:

1. **self-assessment tool for SMEs:** this can range from a simple questionnaire to the provision of a more complete service. It allows SMEs to analyse their situation, to reflect on their main barriers, and to understand how cloud-based solutions can help to improve their situation.
2. **self-assessment tool for students:** a needs assessment questionnaire about the skills identified by the DIHUB. After completing this questionnaire, students can access the DIHUB curriculum (and see where the relevant training is offered) and/or access the DIHUB contents available online.
3. **the DIHUB curriculum:** a training curriculum developed in collaboration with all the partners using a flexible approach to different education and training levels. It is based on the **training program** proposed by DIHUB. It takes into account the results of the DACUM analysis and the feedback from pilots. The DIHUB platform will include information on which training providers (inside and outside the DIHUB consortium) are able to teach each component proposed in the DIHUB curriculum.
4. **open tools and resources:** contents, templates, tools to support students in the development of their skills and SMEs in their processes of innovation. This can include e.g. content related to the DIHUB curriculum, or support resources to help SMEs to perform an internal assessment.
5. **successful DIHUB cases:** Success stories about the development of cloud-based innovations resulting from the collaboration between SMEs and students. The description of each case should highlight the advantages for each stakeholder (student, SME, etc.) and link to the catalogue of services.
6. **DIHUB catalogue of services:** Description of the various services that can be provided by members of the DIHUB. Part of these services are based on the success stories/ collaborations between students and SMEs. Other services are provided by DIHUB project partners or by other members/stakeholders of the ecosystem.



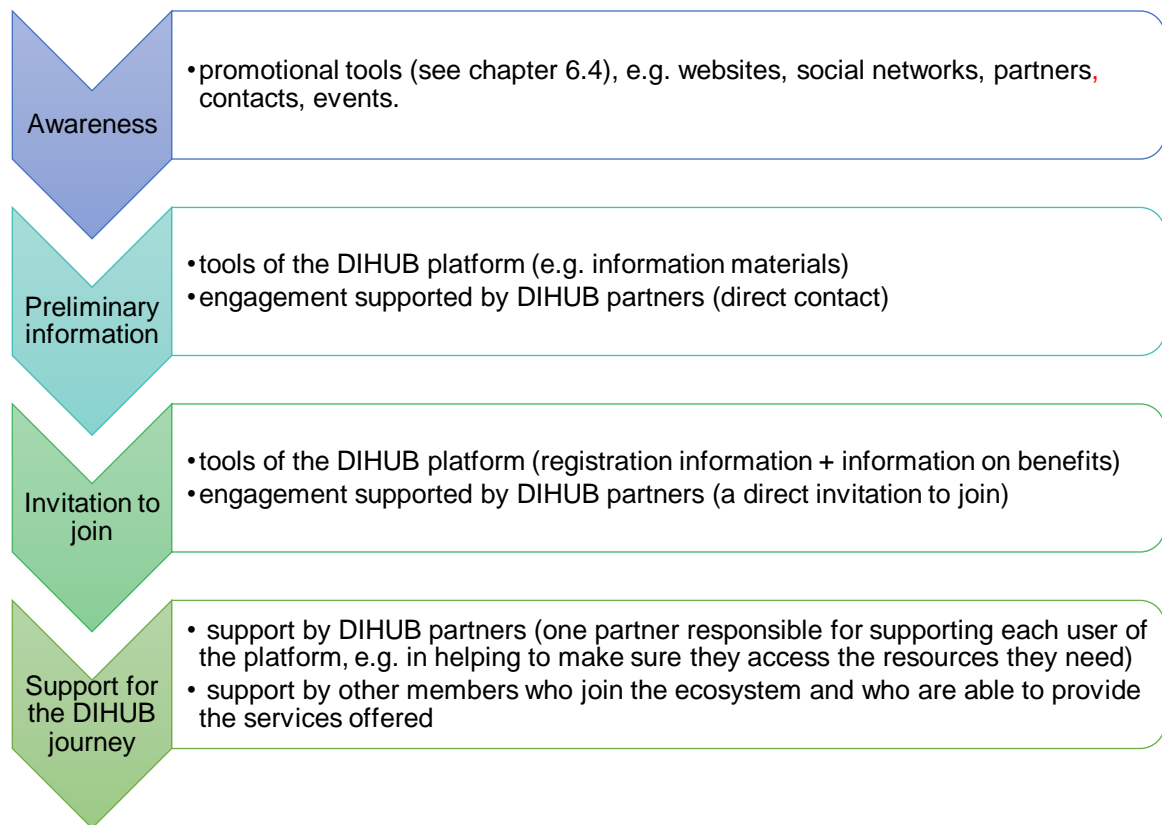
7. **Tools to assess the results and share feedback:** Feedback from and to students and VET providers based on practice.

6.3. *Engaging target groups*

With the tools described above set in place, we can build an engagement process for all stakeholders within the DIHUB, especially for students and SMEs. Thus, it is key that each user/ potential user of the Hub understands what they can get from DIHUB and how they benefit from joining this community. The promotion strategy of the DIHUB should thus be the starting point for a **process of engagement and enlargement of the community**. This process encompasses several phases:

- A. **awareness:** spreading information about the existence of the DIHUB, who it is for, and why people/organisations should be interested in it.
- B. **preliminary information:** what are the services/contents provided by the Hub for each type of user? How can they use them and what are the benefits?
- C. **invitation to join:** convincing users to register in the Hub to benefit from its services.
- D. **support for the DIHUB journey:** once a stakeholder has joined the hub, the DIHUB should suggest to each type of stakeholder a path that fits their needs and expectations, e.g. needs assessment, identification of barriers, access to training/skills, and development of innovation.

The diagram below describes how engagement is ensured throughout these phases.



VET Providers

How they can benefit:

The key message to VET providers is that the DIHUB offers a training curriculum and contents that they can use as a basis for improving and updating their curricula based on the needs of the market. With the DIHUB, VET providers can **benefit from**:

- New/adjusted curriculum to integrate in the training they offer, giving their students the opportunity to develop competences highly demanded on the labour market.
- Involving students in the training programme and working directly with companies, increasing their chances of integration into the labour market
- New possibilities of offering their training services to SMEs and students.

What they can give:

VET providers can enlarge the amount of training that they offer which is displayed in the DIHUB platform. This will allow other members of the DIHUB who need their services to contact them.

SMEs

How they can benefit:

SMEs are possibly the most challenging target group to involve in the DIHUB. They can benefit much from DIHUB services but at the same time, they often do not have the access to cloud-based technology or even the knowledge of how cloud-based technologies can improve their business.

SMEs can benefit from expert support in their innovation process (needs assessment, identification of barriers, solution design). They can also collaborate with students trained in cloud technologies to help overcome challenges that can be addressed through cloud-based technologies and/or Artificial Intelligence. However, this target group needs special attention on how to go through the different phases of the innovation process. In all phases, the communication and support should be focused on the needs and concerns of SMEs, e.g. how the DIHUB can benefit their business, how the DIHUB can help to identify and overcome their barriers, and where they can get the skills/workforce they need.

What they can give:

SMEs can offer real business cases for students, which is key to feeding the dynamic of the Hub. Solutions to SME needs are drivers of cloud-based innovations and competence development.

Students

How they can benefit:

Students are the driving force of the DIHUB. The community can only thrive if there are interested students willing to learn about cloud technologies and work with companies through challenging projects. In the DIHUB, students can benefit from:

- Training in cloud technologies
- Project-based collaboration with companies to solve real cases and create solutions.
- Contacts with students, companies, and training providers in other countries

As with SMEs, the DIHUB students should also be given special attention and continuous support. Thus, a process should be in place with various milestones: applying for the DIHUB, assessment of their skills and needs, going through the path (training + collaboration with an SME), being issued a certificate.

What they can give:

Students are the ones (with support from coaches/ VET providers) developing the solutions required by SMEs. Therefore, they are the workforce and they have the knowledge needed to foster cloud-based innovations.



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Teachers/Coaches

Teachers and coaches are in a position to benefit in various ways from the DIHUB platform, as they are or can be directly connected to all other target groups.

- They work for a VET provider, so they can benefit from the advantages highlighted above;
- They are the “bridge” between students and SMEs and often have the unique expertise and communication skills to make this collaboration lucrative;
- They can enlarge their networks of contacts. They also have the possibility to provide services to others;
- They can improve their own skills and competences by engaging in the training provided by the DIHUB.

Other target groups

Other target groups in the digital innovation ecosystem can and should be engaged in the DIHUB. These other target groups can be Chambers of Commerce, VET accreditation bodies, technology providers, consultants, ministries, research centres etc... Each stakeholder should go through the process of awareness – information – registration – DIHUB journey. When going through the process, they should be able to acknowledge the advantages of belonging to the community.

6.4. Promotion and dissemination tools

Ever since the beginning of the project, various promotion and dissemination tools have been used to raise awareness about the DIHUB and to inform stakeholders about it. These tools should be used today as well, and information about the DIHUB should still be effectively disseminated:

- A. raising awareness of the DIHUB platform and ecosystem
- B. keeping stakeholders informed about the activities of the Hub, generating further interest for new users to join the community.

The DIHUB website and social networks

The DIHUB website has been online since January 2020: <https://dihubcloud.eu/>. The website promotes the project, its aims and objectives and consortium members. It contains public project documents, promotional materials and public reports, information on upcoming project activities and other news. This tool will continue to be available for at least 5 years after the project ends. A specific section of the DIHUB website has a direct link to the DIHUB platform and an invitation to visit the platform.

The most dynamic content of the website is shared in social media platforms to gain more audience. The DIHUB is present on the following platforms:



Facebook: <https://www.facebook.com/DIHUB-110175077195361/>

LinkedIn: <https://www.linkedin.com/groups/8888604/>

Twitter: <https://twitter.com/DihubP>

Promotional Materials:

Different promotional materials are continuously being prepared to raise awareness of the DIHUB platform. Since the target groups are different, the different materials should have a different message, highlighting the benefits of the DIHUB for all types of users.

- **Infographic for SMEs:** online visual presentation of the main DIHUB messages targeted to SMEs
- **PowerPoint presentation:** a general presentation of the DIHUB platform with special slides tailored for each target group

Events

During the lifetime of the DIHUB, partners have organised different events at the national and international level. One of the most popular and effective types of events are the “meet-ups” under the [DIHUB webinar series](#). They are usually 1h to 1h 30 min online events dedicated to a specific target group, (e.g. educators, students), where useful content is shared by experts and/or by participants in DIHUB activities.

These events will be organized in the future, too, because they are a great way to display the results of collaboration within the DIHUB and to inform stakeholders about skills and practices related to cloud-based technologies.

Stakeholder lists with the contacts of each stakeholder

A Stakeholder Database with stakeholders and their contacts as well as the beneficiaries of the project, and other relevant players has been created at the beginning of the project. Each partner is responsible for compiling a list with the relevant representatives of stakeholders and end users from their network. The list should include all contacts at the local, national and European level. It is up to each partner to invite their contacts to join the Hub.

Connections with other hubs at the national and European level

There are several other Digital Innovation Hubs working in similar or complementary fields to those of the DIHUB. Thus, DIHUB should explore possible connections with these Hubs to create a win-win situation:

- Synergies between DIHUB and other DIH Hubs
- Signing memoranda of understanding with other Digital Innovation Hubs to maintain sustainability after the end of the project.

PARTNERS



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INOVA+ (Portugal)



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