

# IMPULS Project Guide to Supporting Life Science SMEs with Internationalisation



**Background:** IMPULS was an Interreg France-Channel-Interreg project that ran from 2021-2023 and provided a range of support activities to help Health & Life Science SMEs on both sides of the Channel with internationalisation. This guide shares some of the key activities we delivered, lessons learned, and recommendations for implementing similar activities in the future.

## What we did:

**1. Consulted with our target group** (small and medium sized enterprises on both sides of the Channel in the Health & Life Sciences sector). The project was planned and implemented during and after the Covid-19 pandemic, in the months and years following Brexit and during the energy and cost of living crisis. This meant that SMEs were very busy dealing with survival and issues related to these bigger challenges so engaging with the target group was much more difficult than anticipated. It also meant that the project partners had to get the IMPULS support offer right in order to maximise buy-in to the programme and make the most of the time spent participating in the project by SMEs.

After the project was approved by Interreg, the partners devised a survey and included questions on the IMPULS expression of interest form to capture the needs and expectations of the target group. We asked companies for information about:

- The challenges they faced with internationalisation
- The types of support interventions they would value
- Topics of interest (for webinars / training)
- The types of international contacts they were looking for including target customer groups
- The most relevant international Life Science events for them

The 18 responses we received (not a high number but reasonable given the timing of the questionnaire in early 2021) enabled the partners to shape the content of the IMPULS support programme.

## 2. Developing the programme of support

The IMPULS application was submitted during the pandemic in 2020 and as such, was planned as a primarily virtual programme of support for Life Science SMEs on both sides of the Channel. The specific offer included:

- Information webinars on topics related to Internationalisation in the Life Science Sector
- Training webinars to help SMEs with some of the key internationalisation challenges
- Virtual marketing tools (videos, pdf brochures and an interactive map to help SMEs showcase their products and services to an international audience)
- Virtual attendance at international Life Science events (conferences, trade shows)
- Online 'pitch & match' sessions with Life Science and internationalisation experts

### 3. Delivering and Adapting the Programme of Support

The partners organised the following activities:

#### Information Webinars:

1. UK NHS Market Access for French SMEs – 30 Sep 2021
2. Les mercredis de la Santé: Royaume-Uni – 17 Nov 2021
3. Landscape for Digital Health Tech in the UK - 24th Nov 2021
4. Cyber Security in Health Care – 22 Feb 2022
5. Innovating to respond to the "new normal" in the UK – 16 June 2022
6. UK Regulations SEHTA – 7 September
7. Medica Briefing for Exhibitors KCC – 20 October 2022
8. Nutrition Regulations Webinar – 11 January 2023

#### Training Webinars:

1. How to access the French Healthcare market – 8 Dec 2021
2. Digital Healthcare– 25 May 2022
3. Preparing for tradeshows – 19 July 2022
4. Promoting your business across the world online – 10 January 2023
5. Legacy webinar/ learnings – 19 January 2023

#### Pitch & Match Sessions:

1. Dealing with regulations in the healthcare systems in the UK and France including a limited number of 121 slots with <u>Psephos BioMedica</u> – 8 & 9 Sep 2022
2. Medical Devices – an opportunity for SMEs exhibiting at Medica 2022 to pitch their company via a webinar – 20 Oct 2022
4. Biotechnology - connect with Biofit participants 7-8 Dec 2022
5. Meet with experts in regulations for the French Medical Devices market – 12 Dec 2022
6. Meet with experts from our Global Digital Marketing Webinar – 10 Jan 2023

#### Virtual International Showcasing Events:

1. SEHTA's International Conference – Oct 2021
2. Arab Health Online - Jan-Feb 2022
3. BioEurope Spring online – 28-31 March 2022
4. Knowledge for Growth – 18-19 May 2022
5. SEHTA International Conference – 13 Oct

Due to feedback and the evolving situation with the pandemic, the project was able to shift activities from virtual to 'real-life' towards the end of the project. This was the case for 2 events in particular whereby the virtual offers for 2 major international trade shows were reduced as the organisers sought to encourage SMEs to return both as visitors and exhibitors. IMPULS organised:

A Franco-British pavilion at Medica 2022 for 13 SMEs – November 2022
Pod space at Arab Health 2023 for 4 SMEs – Jan-Feb 2023

#### 4. Evaluating the Programme and Lessons Learned

Although business engagement was lower than hoped during the early stages of the project due to the global events taking place and impacting the time, resources and priorities of SMEs, the partners captured as much feedback as possible from participating companies. The feedback enabled us to tweak the programme as the project progressed as well as capturing the benefits reported by SMEs.

#### 5. Key findings included:

The main benefits of taking part in IMPULS events were that: **Establishing international connection with relevant service providers/ collaborators/ contacts/ experts**

- **Gaining new leads**
- **Exposure to international network and markets**
- **Network with old and new collaborators**
- **Gaining new knowledge**
- **International exposure and social media exposure**
- **Development of new projects**

SMEs internationalisation can be long process that requires overcoming different challenges, where some of them were identified by our companies: **identification of new clients and broadening client base, networking opportunities focused on specific market, establishment of credible relationships in various markets, and in various regions, familiarization with the regulations in force in different countries.**

Through IMPULS project companies have established contact with other SMEs from other regions and majority of the companies were interested in staying in contact after the end of IMPULS project and developing international partnerships further.

#### 5. Recommendations for Future SME Support Intervention:

1. Engage with your target group at the beginning to help shape the programme of support and continue to obtain feedback during the programme's implementation to ensure that activities remain relevant.
2. Plan a realistic budget – involvement in virtual and physical sector-specific events can be expensive. Plan sufficient resources to deliver best value and support to as many SMEs as possible.
3. Develop clear, concise communication materials which present the specific 'offer' and benefits to target SMEs. What will they gain from participating in an event, what do they need to put in (time / resource). Sometimes a personal approach (phone call, very targeted email) will help the right companies to understand the offer which could otherwise get lost among general email traffic.

4. Select the right SMEs for 'big ticket' support activities. Invite expressions of interest and review them to ensure that the most relevant SMEs are able to join the most suitable programme activities (trade show stand space, videos etc.)
5. Use company testimonies to encourage further sign-ups.
6. Don't expect immediate results – SME internationalisation can be a lengthy process so capture early impacts (export readiness, leads obtained etc.) with a view to following up periodically after an intervention.

