

WP T2.2.1

Report on key findings and
lessons learnt by the
Launchpads for SME
preparation and audit

Contents	Page
1 Methodology	p2
2 The six key deliverables for work package T2.2.1	p3
2.1 Description of the six key deliverables	p3
2.2 The links between the E-Channel consultancy model and the SME journey	p3
3 Key findings and lessons learnt from the six key deliverables	p5
3.1 Deliverable 1: Audit of SME business operation and its current alignment with e-commerce and export or new market development	p5
3.2 Deliverable 2: SME e-commerce and export / new markets aspirations and capabilities	p5
3.3 Deliverable 3: Audit of product range and assessment for new market entry and export potential	p6
3.4 Deliverable 4: Initial e-commerce and new market entry plan including target products, marketing strategies and sales targets including related SME staff time contribution	p7
3.5 Deliverable 5: E-Channel Launchpad and Data Management Control Platform induction	p7
3.5.1 What is a DMCP?	p7
3.6 Deliverable 6: Initial E-Channel DMCP tool selection for each SME	p8
4 The impact of Covid-19 on the Launchpad SME audit and preparation stage	p9
5 The SME Onboarding and Consultation Process and Journey	p10
6 Summary of the fifteen key lessons learnt from the launchpad SME preparation and audit	p12
 Tables	
Table 1 Description of WP 2.2.1 E-Channel bid document: Deliverable T2.2.1 Audit and preparation p25	p3
Table 2 Summary of key lessons learnt	p12

1. Methodology

This report is about the preparation by the Launchpads for working with the SMEs prior to final selection. It is followed by T2.2.2 A Report on SME on-boarding and induction, which covers how the E-Channel Project worked with the participant SMEs once they were selected.

These reports are available at <https://www.e-channel.org/resources/>

This report also covers how project partners, Vertical Plus and Soledis, worked collaboratively to map the steps required for the SME evaluation process, by designing the different stages of the SME Journey with a detailed audit and evaluation plan, against a backdrop of the work to ensure that the tools and technology as well as the consultancy services would support the proposed SME Journey toward new market entry, prior to final SME selection. It also builds on the work undertaken in T 2.1.1 Criteria for participation: A set of criteria (T2.1.2) created and agreed by Vertical Plus and Soledis, to ensure that:

- The participant SMEs have the potential and capability for e-commerce supported export¹. As part of the feedback and a condition of the bid, the France (Channel) England Programme Selection Sub-Committee review team (26.06.2018), drew attention to the phrase 'new market entry' to be used as part of the SME journey, as well as 'export'. This phrase will therefore be included when the original bid document is directly quoted;
- The participant SMEs meet INTERREG SME definition and location criteria.

This led to the creation of a long list of up to 72 potential UK and FR SMEs, working on the basis of an estimated one in three conversion rate.

The E-Channel Project was mindful that a successful SME Journey to access new markets combines many interlinked elements. The technology and consultation services must be designed to support the participant SMEs and the participant SMEs should have the capability and drive to fully benefit from these services. From the outset, E-Channel understood that the SMEs are at the centre of the process. The technology and support services were designed as tools to assist the SMEs, rather than being an end in themselves. It was therefore critical to get the best match between tools and services offered and SME potential not only to access the tools but to fully engage with them. A robust selection process for participant SMEs was crucial.

This report also reflects on how the project partners mitigated against Covid-19. The Covid-19 pandemic events from Spring 2020, began at a time when the audit and preparation process had already started, with work on the process of SME identification and long listing well underway. This had a huge impact on this stage of the E-Channel project. Innovative, new ways were found to deliver the project to the participant SMEs, for example through remote access including the use of Moodle². This will be discussed in greater detail in section 4.

Key information has been taken from discussions, reports, technical support guidance documents, minutes and meetings between staff from Soledis in France and Vertical Plus in the UK. Information has also been taken from notes and key documents produced by the team working on specific components of the E-Channel consultancy services; including input from Directors, technical and SME facing colleagues from Soledis and Vertical Plus, involved in the consultancy services. It also captures feedback from some trial runs with SMEs not associated with the project, to give the DMCP³ a 'shake-down' as well as some initial SME feedback.

¹ As part of the feedback and a condition of the bid, the France (Channel) England Programme Selection Sub-Committee review team (26.06.2018), drew attention to the phrase 'new market ENTRY' to be used as part of the SME journey, as well as 'export'. This phrase will therefore be included when the original bid document is directly quoted.

² Moodle is a learning platform designed to provide educators, administrators and learners with a single robust, secure and integrated system to create personalised learning environments. More Information is available at <https://moodle.org/>

³ Data Management Control Platform: please refer to section 2.5.1 What is a DMCP?

2. The six key deliverables for work package T2.2.1

2.1 Description of the six key deliverables

The outcomes will be an intensive audit and preparation for each SME [24] by the E Channel Launchpad prior to final selection.

There are six key activities in this work package:

1	Audit of SME business operation and current alignment with e-commerce, with regard to export or to develop and enter new markets through e-commerce.
2	Determine the aspirations and capacities of SMEs to export or enter new markets via e-commerce.
3	Audit of product range and assessment for new market entry or export potential.
4	The Launchpad Account Manager to agree an initial e-commerce export or new market entry plan with the SME, including target products, marketing strategies and sales targets including related SME staff time contribution.
5	E-Channel Launchpad and Data Management Control Platform induction.
6	Agree initial E-Channel Platform tool selection for each participant SME with operational set-up and training in line with the agreed initial e-commerce new market entry or export plan.

Table 1: Description of WP 2.2.1 E-Channel bid document: Deliverable T2.2.1 Audit and preparation p25

2.2 The links between the E-Channel consultancy model and the SME journey

As part of the preparation, and in order to map out the steps needed to get to the SME audit stage, agreement was first needed as to:

- the E-Channel consultancy model
- the SME journey

In our report on key lessons learnt in establishing E-Channel Consultancy Services (T1.2.2)⁴, we reported that:

From the kick-off meeting (11.09.2019), it was clear to the E-Channel team that while a key objective was to achieve synergies in the consultancy model, a slightly different approach in the UK and France might be needed.

Key aspects of discussion from the kick-off meeting included:

- *How Soledis works with SMEs in France, based on Soledis B2B expertise;*
- *How Vertical Plus works with SMEs in the UK, based on Vertical Plus B2C expertise;*
- *Cultural and language differences;*
- *Technical and software differences;*

⁴ This report is available at <https://www.e-channel.org/resources>

- *French SME expectations of e-commerce in France and how they could approach the UK market;*
- *English SME expectations of e-commerce in the UK and how they could approach the French market;*
- *The tools used and advice given by Soledis based on their sales model;*
- *The tools used and advice given by Vertical Plus based on their Return on Investment (ROI) business model;*
- *Impact of Brexit on French SMEs seeking new markets in the UK;*
- *Impact of Brexit on UK SMEs seeking new markets in France.*

The team agreed to establish a working consultancy structure. Presentation of the consultancy offer to SMEs would also be paramount. The team considered what the offer to the SMEs would look like and how to promote the offer. It was agreed that a checklist would be important, not only in identifying potential participant SMEs but also to assist the E-Channel Team in assessing where the SME is on the e-commerce, new market journey. Then, on-boarding and induction would be inextricably linked to assessing SME needs and creating their individual project plan.

The importance of a clear, shared vision for the SME journey was recognised by the lead partner before the bidding stage of the project. This objective became paramount once project partners, Vertical Plus and Soledis, began their collaboration on the E-Channel consultancy model.

Key lesson 1

A key lesson learnt from this early, preparatory stage was that the E-Channel consultancy model was inextricably linked to the SME journey and both were subsequently informed by data gathered from SME screening, evaluation, and subsequent audits. This helped clarify and extend understanding for both E-Channel and the SMEs as to how their current operational models and business plans reference new market entry, including export aspirations and how this can be incorporated, while being cognisant of Brexit and Covid-19. There was an important synergy between all these elements.

Key lesson 2

A key lesson learnt from working with the SMEs prior to final selection, was the importance of the project partners having a shared, clear vision of what the SME Journey would look like for participant SMEs. The project partners designed and planned a clearly defined SME journey, with identified steps. This SME Roadmap was agreed early on in the project and a further mapping activity produced a flowchart; SME Onboarding and Consultation Process and Journey⁵. This document had the dual impact of showcasing the steps in the process of how E-Channel would work with and support the SMEs. It also ensured clear communication, collaboration, preparation time and delivery milestones for both project partners.

⁵ This flowchart: SME Onboarding and Consultation Process and Journey, will be discussed further in Section 5 and will be available at <https://www.e-channel.org/resources/>

3. Key findings and lessons learnt from the six key deliverables

3.1 Deliverable 1: Audit of SME business operation and current alignment with e-commerce and export or new market entry development

A project modification was made on 04.05.2020 to address how the SME would work with their Launchpad in the light of Covid-19. It was agreed that all face to face interviews and screenings with SMEs should take place digitally, unless by very special arrangement. The project partners were also mindful that this new way of working, without meeting in person, might create a more formal level of communication and that it might also take longer to establish more personal relationships with the SMEs. Establishing a relationship was important because as a consultancy service, E-Channel was very keen to provide a strong basis for effective ongoing mentoring.

The project partners agreed that online self-assessments for SMEs would not be used. The project partners felt that SME self-assessment would not necessarily provide a realistic situational picture of the company.

The project partners agreed that a Company Specific Criteria Checklist Sheet⁶ would be used for the initial meeting with the potential participant SME to ensure that they met the key criteria including confirmation that they are an SME and that they are based in the France Channel England designated area. This proforma would also act as a script with a clear structure, and could be used by both Launchpads.

Key lesson 3

A key lesson learnt was that the initial audit design for a company evaluation was a key factor in establishing criteria to determine the suitability of potential participant SMEs and to ensure that questions were asked in an order of priority as well as gathering basic information about the company.

Our thanks to the EIS⁷ project for sharing their audit design and template for a company evaluation with us.

3.2 Deliverable 2: SME e-commerce aspirations and capabilities for export or new market entry

The process of developing a screening tool for participant SMEs, the Company Evaluation Sheet, led to valuable dialogue for E-Channel project partners to ensure that participant SMEs would be offered the most relevant support services, in line with their e-commerce and export aspirations and capabilities.

One objective for the project partners was to build into the Company Evaluation Sheet an effective way to assess SME ability and willingness to increase their international activities or their pursuit of new market entry, and the impact of this on turnover. It was important from this early stage in the process, to think about how the project partners would work with their

⁶ E-Channel Company Specific Criteria Checklist is available at <https://www.e-channel.org/resources/>

⁷ EIS: <https://www.interreurope.eu/eis/>

participant SMEs, on both sides of the Channel, to align a business plan to an e-commerce and new market strategy.

Key lesson 4

A key lesson learnt was to set realistic expectations for the potential participant SME at the earliest stage of the process, and underline that exporting or new market entry always carries some degree of risk. Establishing this dialogue early on, helped to match the SMEs expectations concerning their actual situation, potential and profitability, including their investment of effort in entering new markets via e-commerce.

Key lesson 5

A key lesson learnt was that SMEs often have different aspirations and capabilities, which during the Spring, Summer and Autumn of 2020, were particularly volatile and subject to fast change. An important component of the SME Roadmap was therefore to set up a robust screening and evaluation process for e-commerce new market entry or export aspirations and capabilities, in tandem with regular catch-up meetings throughout the SMEs involvement with the project. In this way, the project partners would seek to ensure the best match between the consultancy services offered by E-Channel and the SMEs capacity and opportunity for entering new markets via e-commerce. Importantly, the regular meetings could then be used to monitor and maintain SME capacity to engage with this process and to therefore mitigate against SME drop out.

3.3 Deliverable 3: Audit of product range and assessment for new market entry and export potential

The project partners agreed that, from their own business experience of supporting SMEs with e-commerce prior to the E-Channel project, stock control and inventory would most likely be a key issue when auditing SME product range. Therefore, this work package would need to be allocated sufficient time for the Launchpads to have dialogue with SMEs on their current stock control and how it serves their domestic market before being able to enter into dialogue to assess new market entry and export potential.

Key lesson 6

A key lesson learnt was that stock control and inventory, although foreseen as potentially problematic areas, was indeed a key issue when auditing SMEs product range. Due to Covid-19, many of the initial conversations with those SMEs using the system as a trial run, and then during the participant SME selection process, centred around mitigating the impact of Covid-19 on that SMEs own domestic market, and general conversations around their stock control and inventory practice in their domestic and local markets, before the SME felt confident in discussing and planning new market entry or export potential.

3.4 Deliverable 4: Initial e-commerce and new market entry plan including target products, marketing strategies and sales targets including related SME staff time contribution

The project partners believed that a major step in the SME journey, and the big draw for the SMEs, was that they would receive a new market entry plan⁸. The project partners agreed that a new market entry plan would, necessarily, involve a lot of intense and detailed work with, and for, each participant SME. A new market entry plan proforma was designed and agreed by the project partners so that the process of creating the plan with the SME would be clear, consistent and robust.

Key lesson 7

A key lesson learnt was that it proved to be very helpful to invite some 'friendly' SMEs, already known to the project partners, and who were not participant SMEs, to act as a 'critical friend', to give the apparatus a 'shake-down' to turn the preparation process from a theoretical map to a practical model.

By taking time to trial and model the process with this third party, to look at the potential length of the SME Journey, including specific touch points, meetings and targets along it, as well as the staffing, and areas of expertise to be addressed in, and omitted from, this stage of the SME journey, actually saved a lot of time. It shed light on any anomalous wording and vocabulary which might otherwise have confused SMEs new to e-commerce, or navigating a language different to their own. It also served as a double check for the project partners to ensure they were still aligned in their shared vision of the SME Journey.

3.5 Deliverable 5: Induction to the E-Channel Launchpads and the Data Management Control Platform induction

3.5.1 What is a DMCP?

The Data Management Control Platform, or DMCP, is a data and support model for organising inventory, identifying opportunities and measuring success in online marketplaces.

The DMCP incorporates four important stages of e-commerce new market entry and growth.

1. Inventory Management
2. Market Assessment
3. Business Planning
4. Business Growth

A new market can be defined as a distinguishable group of potential customers that might buy a company's products.

⁸ The proforma for a new market entry plan will be available at <https://www.e-channel.org/resources/>

Key lesson 8

A key lesson learnt was that the four stages of the DMCP do not need to be completed in order but are used to support a new market plan that is dependent on the position and opportunities for each SME. Once in place, this plan will then be monitored and revised during the support provided on new market entry.

The DMCP was originally conceived to support SMEs via their Launchpad including face to face mentoring. This was no longer possible with restrictions on travel and requirements for social distancing as a result of Covid-19. E-Channel has moved SMEs to remote access training and support via Moodle, a learning platform designed to provide educators, administrators and learners with a single robust, secure and integrated system to create personalised learning environments. This has also changed the planned nature of the Launchpads engagement with SMEs. SMEs will now be able to access tools and services remotely via launchpad.e-channel.org

More information about the DMCP can be found in a report that summarises the work to create the DMCP, which is available at <https://www.e-channel.org/resources/>

3.6 Deliverable 6: Initial E-Channel DMCP tool selection for each SME

The rationale for the E-Channel DMCP tool selection for each SME was agreed by the project partners early on in the project. It was always envisaged that the Launchpads, one in the UK and one in France, would support SMEs to develop their integrated e-commerce new market entry and export strategy, linked to an overall sales and marketing plan. To do this, SMEs will use a subset of tools from the DMCP, depending on their specific journey and to some extent, culture and expectation. SMEs will access this subset, based on an assessment, as a result of their agreed development plan with the Launchpads. Therefore, SMEs will only see the set of tools relevant and pre-agreed with them; supporting the individual SME journey.

SMEs will access consultancy advice and guidance via their Launchpad, to determine the most relevant e-commerce sales channels for them, together with support on the choice and implementation of the tools required for each of the chosen e-commerce sales channels. The Launchpads will also support SMEs to ensure their inventory is structured in a way to most effectively sell via the e-commerce sales channels chosen. SMEs will be supported by their E-Channel Launchpad to either build on their experience or engage in new approaches to e-commerce and exporting. The SMEs own e-commerce new market and export strategy will determine their initial level of engagement with the different tools within the E-Channel Platform and the E-Channel Launchpads will then help them move forward through practical advice and consultancy support.

4. The impact of Covid-19 on the Launchpads during the SME preparation and audit stage

The E-Channel Project started against a backdrop of Brexit uncertainty, including what post Brexit trading conditions might look like for SMEs looking to internationalise. However, the Covid-19 pandemic events of Spring / Summer 2020, just as the process of SME identification and long listing was starting, had a huge impact on this stage of the project.

As with all SMEs during this time, the first step was to mitigate the impact of Covid-19 on the project partners themselves; ensuring staff safety including arrangements for working from home, and securing work premises, while assessing the impact of the virus on their core business. It soon became very clear that, for the E-Channel project to continue, there would need to be changes in order to mitigate the situation which was in a state of flux until Summer 2020.

At this stage, April/May 2020, it became clear that the increased demand for e-commerce capacity was also coupled with the challenge of how to assess and recruit suitable SME beneficiaries for an intensive and close consultancy and mentorship program using only online tools and remote meetings. To continue to offer the E-Channel Consultancy Services, changes would also have to be made to how participant SMEs would interface with their Launchpads.

A Project Modification made on 04.05.2020, and agreed on 18.06.2020, to ensure that the project deliverables would still be achieved, and that SMEs would still be able to work with their Launchpad to access their agreed subset of E-Channel Platform tools. The way in which this deliverable would be achieved changed as per the modification so that, for each SME, the operational set up and training in their initial e-commerce new market entry plan would take place via Moodle. There was a greater reliance on working with SMEs remotely via conferencing. The process of recruitment, onboarding and program delivery changed to largely online activities. The website and DMCP, which had already been developed, were adjusted for greater online distance learning, training and development, including Moodle.

Key lesson 9

A key lesson learnt from feedback from the SMEs who were helping to trial the systems at this time was that they were very happy to do more online, particularly in the circumstances and even asked for more remote access where possible.

5. The SME Onboarding and Consultation Process and Journey

Project partners Vertical Plus and Soledis collaborated and shared technology to build and align the tools and systems to be used with the participant SMEs for the E-Channel Project. The early stage of project development necessarily centred around the DMCP. However, the project partners were always clear that the technology was there to support the SMEs. The importance of a clear, shared vision for the SME journey was always paramount. Vertical Plus and Soledis were themselves a crucial part of that journey.

From the initial planning stage, in order to prepare to receive SMEs, the proposed SME journey was clearly defined and carefully planned, with identified steps. This was agreed by the project partners before any SMEs were approached. A further mapping activity produced a flowchart; SME Onboarding and Consultation Process and Journey in a process driven roadmap. This flowchart will be available at <https://www.e-channel.org/resources/>.

Key lesson 10

A key lesson learnt was the importance of ensuring collaboration and preparation time for both project partners to work together, to ensure that the process driven roadmap would create the same quality of experience for each SME regardless of which side of the channel they were on. In this way, the SME Journey became tangible. It was paramount for the partners to understand the operational impact of delivering the E-Channel process driven roadmap. The roadmap helped the project partners to map out the impact of the SME journey on E-Channel itself in terms of staffing levels and costs, diary management, dates and deadlines. This also helped the project partners to manage staffing levels and staff costs during the lockdown period.

Key lesson 11

A key lesson learnt was that when project partners set out, agreed and mapped the SME journey before approaching SMEs, they felt better able to explain the process to the potential participant SMEs, prior to final selection, and were ultimately more confident that they would recruit SMEs who would be a 'best fit' for the project. Both Partners were therefore aligned to attract initial SME interest and engagement.

Key lesson 12

A key lesson learnt was the importance of the potential participant SMEs understanding what would be required from them, including their agreement to fully engage with the project, prior to final selection, to give them time to reflect on their commitment and capacity for growth.

Key lesson 13

A key lesson learnt by the Project Partners was that despite putting in place a rigorous selection process and specific recruitment criteria, each SME is on a different journey and this journey can be influenced or interrupted by external factors including Brexit and Covid-19. The SME journey will have different stages, with differences in successes and challenges. It was therefore important to build into the flowchart how and when this might be addressed with the SMEs. The SME Onboarding and Consultation Process and Journey therefore included a process for the Launchpad teams to capture the SME journey and experience at pre-agreed touch points along the way.

Key lesson 14

A key lesson learnt was the importance of media and marketing to have something to show all stakeholders, and so to prioritise and to focus on what is visible from outside the project as soon as possible.

- Having the marketing materials ready to share with the SMEs, to show them what their journey might look like was a powerful starting point and key to SME engagement.
- The marketing materials were also key to BSO⁹ and non-BSO support for the project, which again, served to augment SME interest.

Key lesson 15

A key lesson learnt was the importance of clear communication between Launchpads, using the process driven roadmap, to ensure consistency of service and experience for both French and UK SMEs. As a response to earlier feedback about SMEs wanting to do more online, the project partners planned to encourage the participant SMEs to network with each other. It was anticipated that although being in different market areas with different market plans, the participant SMEs would compare notes on the consultancy services they had received from E-Channel. Many of the shortlisted French SMEs spoke excellent English which also would facilitate cross channel communication between them. The project partners saw consistency of service as a crucial element of overall SME satisfaction with E-Channel.

⁹ Business Support Organisation

6. Summary of the fifteen key lessons learnt by the launchpad concerning the preparation and audit of SMEs

The table below is a summary of key lessons learnt in establishing E-Channel Consultancy Services.

No	Key lessons learnt
1	A key lesson learnt from this early, preparatory stage was that the E-Channel consultancy model was inextricably linked to the SME journey and both were subsequently informed by data gathered from SME screening, evaluation, and subsequent audits. This helped clarify and extend understanding for both E-Channel and the SMEs as to how their current operational models and business plans reference new market entry, including export aspirations and how this can be incorporated, while being cognisant of Brexit and Covid-19. There was an important synergy between all these elements.
2	A key lesson learnt from working with the SMEs prior to final selection, was the importance of the project partners having a shared, clear vision of what the SME Journey would look like for participant SMEs. The project partners designed and planned a clearly defined SME journey, with identified steps. This SME Roadmap was agreed early on in the project and a further mapping activity produced a flowchart; SME Onboarding and Consultation Process and Journey. This document had the dual impact of showcasing the steps in the process of how E-Channel would work with and support the SMEs. It also ensured clear communication, collaboration, preparation time and delivery milestones for both project partners.
3	A key lesson learnt was that the initial audit design for a company evaluation was a key factor in establishing criteria to determine the suitability of potential participant SMEs and to ensure that questions were asked in an order of priority as well as gathering basic information about the company.
4	A key lesson learnt was to set realistic expectations for the potential participant SME at the earliest stage of the process, and underline that exporting or new market entry always carries some degree of risk. Establishing this dialogue early on, helped to match the SMEs expectations concerning their actual situation, potential and profitability, including their investment of effort in entering new markets via e-commerce.
5	A key lesson learnt was that SMEs often have different export aspirations and capabilities, which during the Spring, Summer and Autumn of 2020, were particularly volatile and subject to fast change. An important component of the SME Roadmap was therefore to set up a robust screening and evaluation process for e-commerce and export aspirations and capabilities, in tandem with regular catch-up meetings throughout the SMEs involvement with the project. In this way, the project partners would seek to ensure the best match between the consultancy services offered by E-Channel and the SMEs capacity and opportunity for entering new markets via e-commerce including export. Importantly, the regular meetings could then be used to monitor and maintain SME capacity to engage with this process and to therefore mitigate against SME drop out.
6	A key lesson learnt was that stock control and inventory, although foreseen as potentially problematic areas, was indeed a key issue when auditing SMEs product range. Due to Covid-19, many of the initial conversations with those SMEs using the system as a trial run, and then during the participant SME selection process, centred

	around mitigating the impact of Covid-19 on that SMEs own domestic market, and general conversations around their stock control and inventory practice in their domestic and local markets, before the SME felt confident in discussing and planning new market entry or export potential.
7	A key lesson learnt was that it proved to be very helpful to invite some 'friendly' SMEs, already known to the project partners, and who were not participant SMEs, to act as a 'critical friend', to give the apparatus a 'shake-down' to turn the preparation process from a theoretical map to a practical model.
8	A key lesson learnt was that the four stages of the DMCP do not need to be completed in order but are used to support a new market plan that is dependent on the position and opportunities for each SME. Once in place, this plan will then be monitored and revised during the support provided on new market entry.
9	A key lesson learnt from feedback from the SMEs who were helping to trial the systems at this time was that they were very happy to do more online, particularly in the circumstances and even asked for more remote access where possible.
10	A key lesson learnt was the importance of ensuring collaboration and preparation time for both project partners to work together, to ensure that the process driven roadmap would create the same quality of experience for each SME regardless of which side of the channel they were on. In this way the SME Journey became tangible. It was paramount for the partners to understand the operational impact of delivering the E-Channel process driven roadmap. The roadmap helped the project partners to map out the impact of the SME journey on E-Channel itself in terms of staffing levels and costs, diary management, dates and deadlines. This also helped the project partners to manage staffing levels and staff costs during the lockdown period.
11	A key lesson learnt was that when project partners set out, agreed and mapped the SME journey before approaching SMEs, they felt better able to explain the process to the potential participant SMEs, prior to final selection, and were ultimately more confident that they would recruit SMEs who would be a 'best fit' for the project. Both Partners were therefore aligned to attract initial SME interest and engagement.
12	A key lesson learnt was the importance of the potential participant SMEs understanding what would be required from them, including their agreement to fully engage with the project, prior to final selection, to give them time to reflect on their commitment and capacity for growth.
13	A key lesson learnt by the Project Partners was that despite putting in place a rigorous selection process and specific recruitment criteria, each SME is on a different journey and this journey can be influenced or interrupted by external factors including Brexit and Covid-19. The SME journey will have different stages, with differences in successes and challenges. It was therefore important to build into the flowchart how and when this might be addressed with the SME. The SME Onboarding and Consultation Process and Journey therefore included a process for the Launchpad teams to capture the SME journey and experience at pre-agreed touch points along the way.
14	A key lesson learnt was the importance of media and marketing to have something to show all stakeholders, and so to prioritise and to focus on what is visible from outside the project as soon as possible.

	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Having the marketing materials ready to share with the SMEs, to show them what their journey might look like was a powerful starting point and key to SME engagement. • The marketing materials were also key to BSO and non-BSO support for the project, which again, served to augment SME interest.
15	<p>A key lesson learnt was the importance of clear communication between Launchpads, using the process driven roadmap, to ensure consistency of service and experience for both French and UK SMEs. As a response to earlier feedback about SMEs wanting to do more online, the project partners planned to encourage the participant SMEs to network with each other. It was anticipated that although being in different market areas with different market plans, the participant SMEs would compare notes on the consultancy services they had received from E-Channel. Many of the shortlisted French SMEs spoke excellent English which also would facilitate cross channel communication between them. The project partners saw consistency of service as a crucial element of overall SME satisfaction with E-Channel.</p>

Table 2: Summary of key lessons learnt in establishing E-Channel Consultancy Services