



Horizon 2020 SME Innovation Associate

Matching talented researchers and business



SMEs



PHDs



WORKSHOP

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Interim findings and preliminary recommendations of the accompanying study

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Scope and Methodology

Focus areas evaluated in the study

- Management of the call for proposals
- Design and implementation of the pilot action
- Impact of the pilot action on SMEs
- Impact of the pilot action on researcher's careers

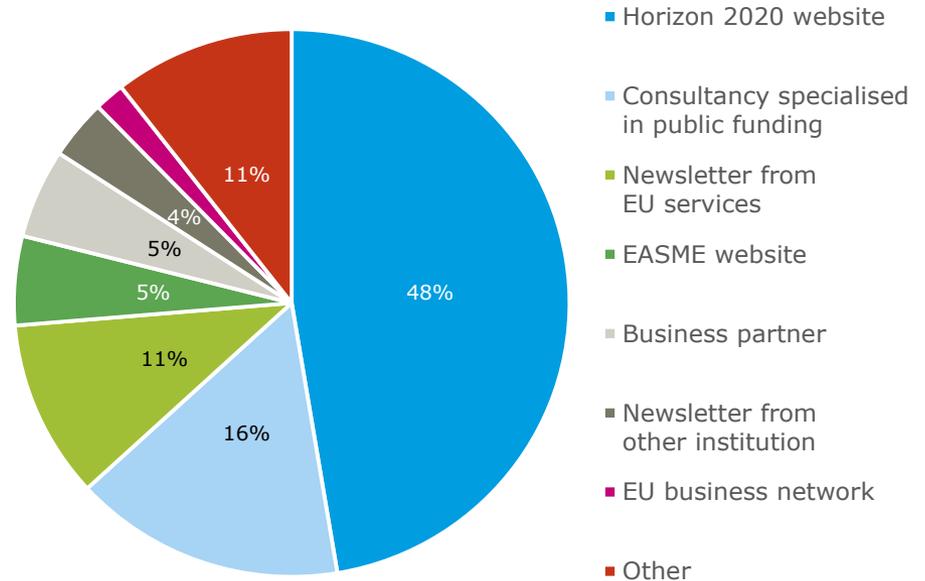
Data sources



Management of the call for proposals

Communication Activities in advance of the call for proposals

- The employed communication channels of the European Commission – e. g. the Horizon 2020 website, newsletter from EU services (EASME, Commission, Horizon 2020, etc.) and EASME website – proved to be very effective to make the pilot action known among the target group.
- The communication activities generated a good response from intermediary organisations and the target group.
- Social media (especially Twitter and LinkedIn) were used extensively, but tended to only reach intermediaries and not the target group directly.



Design and implementation of the pilot action

Design elements of the pilot action

- The core elements of the design of the pilot action were positively received by intermediaries and supported SMEs:
 - A grant scheme for highly-skilled researchers with an aid intensity of 100%
→ Supported SMEs showed a willingness to accept lower aid intensities
 - The selection criteria for innovation projects
- Other design elements of the pilot received mixed or less favourable reviews from supported SMEs and Innovation Associates, most notably:
 - The length and the rigid start and end dates of the funding period
 - The length of the predefined recruitment phase between grant award and start of the funding period
 - The inability to adapt vacancy notices on EURAXESS in terms of job description and salary offered in response to feedback from potential candidates

Design and implementation of the pilot action

Support Structures

- The support provided by EASME to SMEs during the recruitment and phase and placement period was highly valued by SMEs.
- Reporting requirements, user forms and the overall amount of paperwork to be completed were considered appropriate by a large majority of SMEs.

EU-level training scheme for Innovation Associates and Supervisors

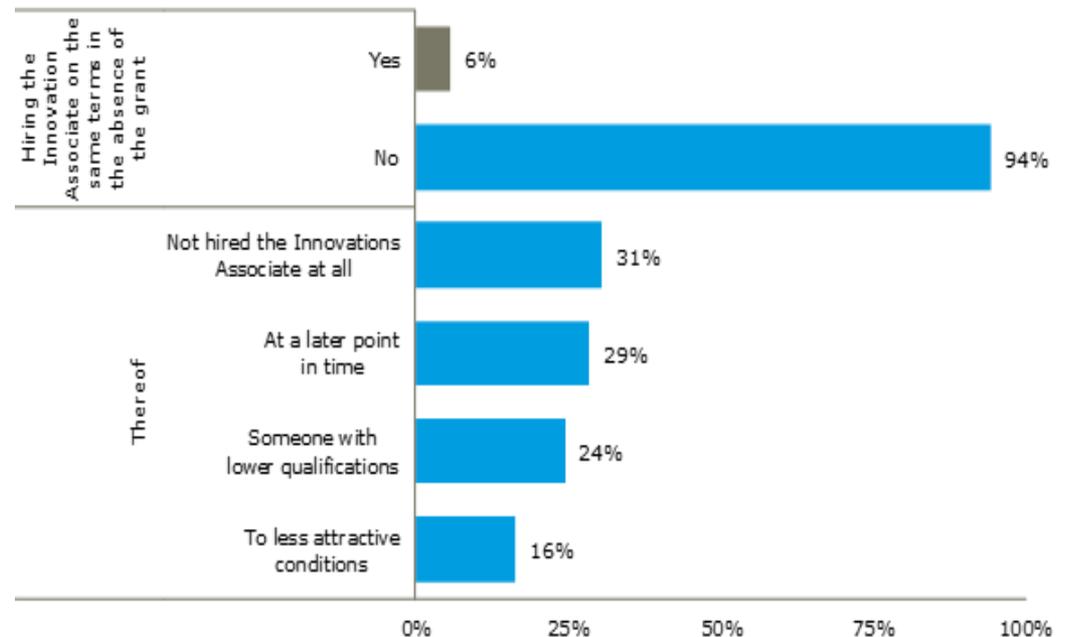
- The quality of the content and the expertise of the trainers of the EU-level training scheme were rated as high both by the Innovation Associates and their SME supervisors.
- The training scheme received mixed feedback in terms of the relevance of particular topics for the Innovation Associates, which were seen by a sizeable minority of SME supervisors and Innovation Associates as more relevant for SME supervisors.
- The length of the training scheme was considered to be appropriate by the majority of surveyed SME supervisors and Innovation Associates.

Impact of the pilot action on SMEs

Impact on talent acquisition

- For almost all SMEs, employing the same Innovation Associates for the same conditions and at the same time would not have been possible without the grant.
- The dead-weight effect (SMEs received the grant even though they did not need it) is very small.

Question: *Would you have hired your current Innovation Associate in the absence of the grant?*



N= 52

Source: *Online survey of the supported SMEs by Ramboll Management Consulting in May 2018.*

Impact of the pilot action on researchers' careers

Background of researchers

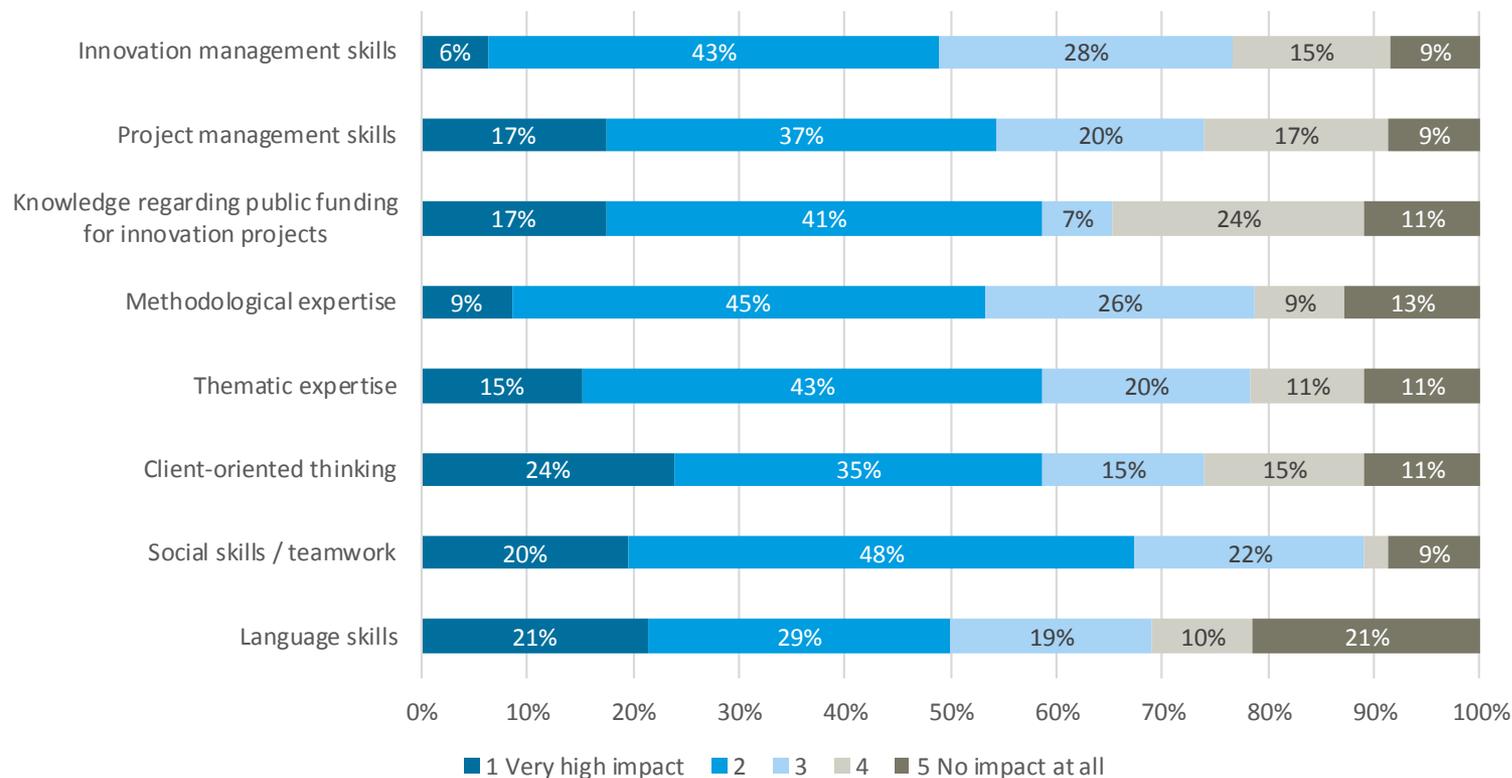
- Almost all Innovation Associates have an academic background in natural sciences, engineering or computer sciences.
- Almost all Innovation Associates have substantial work experience (Ø 8 years), both in academia and in the private sector.

Current Career Choice

- The majority of the Innovation Associates had job offers from other employers (especially from academia) and / or were in another job at the time they were negotiating with their current employer.
- The main reasons to work for their current employer were:
 - A match between the researcher's professional interests and the business area of the respective SME/the innovation project of the SME,
 - The wish to gain experience and boost career perspectives in industry
 - To work abroad.

Impact of the pilot action on researchers' careers

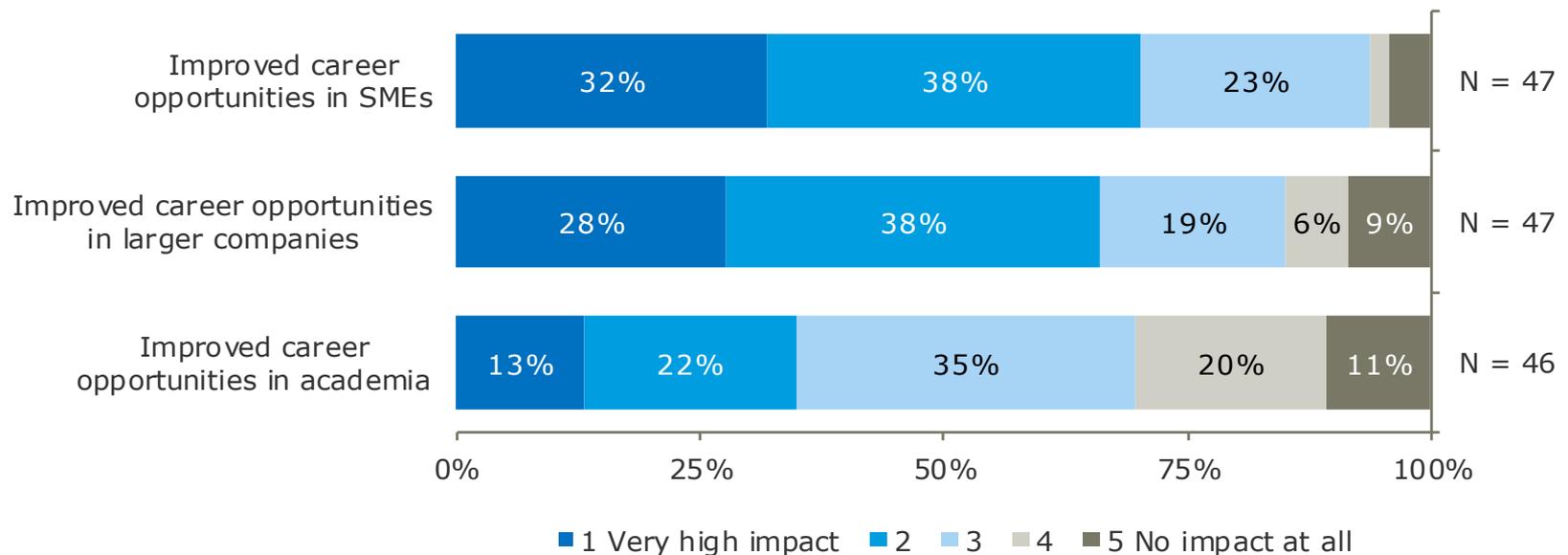
Assessment of impact on researchers skills and qualifications



Source: Online survey of Innovation Associates by Ramboll Management Consulting in 8/2018.

Impact of the pilot action on researchers' careers

Assessment of impact on future career opportunities

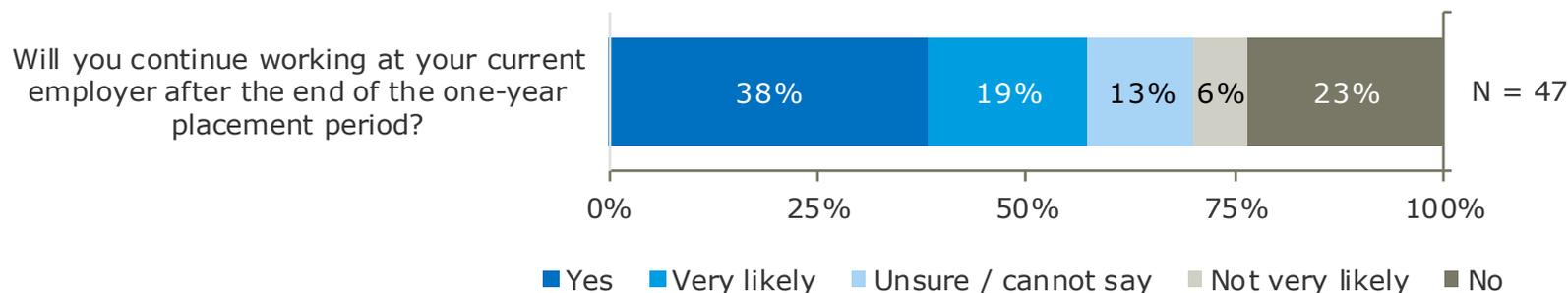


Source: Online survey of Innovation Associates by Ramboll Management Consulting in 8/2018.

Impact of the pilot action on researchers' careers

Creating sustainable employment in SMEs

- Nearly 60% of surveyed Innovation Associates indicated a high likelihood that they would continue working for their current employer or had already prolonged their contracts.
- Nine out of ten Innovation Associates could imagine seeing themselves working for an SME in the medium to long term.



Draft Recommendations

Short term recommendations

- Improve the communication strategy to increase the visibility of the pilot action in the target group by e.g.:
 - Approaching NCPs, RCPs, the EEN and other intermediaries earlier on
 - Directly approaching innovation agencies and consultancies specialised in public funding
 - Putting more focus on multipliers in the Central and Eastern European countries
- Provide more articulate information to intermediaries and the target group on the added value of the Innovation Associates, especially in contrast to the Marie Curie Actions.
- Increase the scope of information provided to the applicant SMEs during the application process.

Draft Recommendations

Short term recommendations

- Adapt the scope and increase the relevance of the EU-level training scheme.
- Improve the synchronisation between the EU-level and company-level trainings, e.g. by informing applicant SMEs earlier on the content and scope of the EU-level training scheme.
- Improve data availability for future evaluations.

Medium- to long-term recommendations

- Extend the placement period and simultaneously introduce a co-financing of the costs by the SMEs.