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5.8 million euro Franco-British project to help tackle digital skills shortage

The *Faculty of Creative and Cultural Industries* at the University of Portsmouth will lead a new multi-million euro project that will improve the employment rates of women from disadvantaged backgrounds by developing a range of digital tools and technologies that will be used to tackle the digital skills shortage that currently exists in the UK and France.

The project will receive 4 million euros of funding from the EU funded Interreg France (Channel) England Programme¹.

The project, known as PONToon (Partnership Opportunities using New Technologies fostering Social and economic inclusion), will target socially excluded women who are far removed from the labour market and who may face challenges such as single parenthood and mental health issues.

PONToon will focus on developing several digital tools that will help upskill women by improving their digital competencies and providing them with the necessary digital skills to access the labour market.

The various tools will include virtual reality interviews, webinars and bespoke computer game experiences, where the game scenarios aim to engage and train users on basic and advanced ICT skills, social media usage and other digital skills. These novel forms of training are often found to be more engaging and effective than traditional methods and will help socially excluded women gain the relevant employability skills needed to support their economic inclusion.

The tools will be co-created and developed by women who currently do not have access to digital technology. Through developing the tools they will learn additional skills on idea development, data creation and project management.

The toolkit will then be shared with service providers, job centres and local authorities enabling them to offer a more engaging and complete training offer to women. Over the 3-and-a-half year lifetime of the project, the tools developed by PONToon will help train 1600 women with the aim of 400 participants returning to work as a direct result of this training.

Commenting on the project's approval Professor Joan Farrer, Associate Dean (Enterprise & Innovation) from the University of Portsmouth said: *"Our world today is becoming increasingly reliant on digital technology. For a lot of disadvantaged women there is a lack of training available to help them understand and use this technology.*

"By using cross-border expertise, this project will provide engaging ways of teaching women how to use this technology. This will mean that what may seem like small tasks, such as writing a CV or using Google maps to find an interview, become easier. These skills will play an important role in helping these women find a job.

We are also very proud to be one of the recipients of this funding, which will have significant impact in France and the UK.”

PONToon is a cross-border project with 11 partners from the UK and France taking part (5 from France, 6 from UK). The total project budget is 5.8 million euros with 69% funded by the Interreg France (Channel) England programme, representing a European Regional Development Fund contribution of 4 million euros.

-Ends-

For further information, please contact:

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Notes to Editors

1. The Interreg France (Channel) England Programme is a European Territorial Cooperation programme that aims to fund high quality cooperation projects in the Channel border region between France and England. It focuses on a range of specific objectives including supporting innovation, improving the attractiveness of the FCE area and developing low carbon technologies. The Programme has a total of €223 million of ERDF funds to distribute by 2023 and is managed by Managing Authority Norfolk County Council. More information about the Programme can be found at <https://interreg5a-fce.eu/>.
2. The Programme operates within a clearly defined eligible area, covering the South and East Coasts of England from Cornwall to Norfolk, and the North Coast of France from Finistère to Pas-de-Calais. The programme area can be found here.
3. Project Partners:
 - *Lead partner: University of Portsmouth (UK)*
 - Amiens Métropole (France)
 - TRAJECTIO – Travailler en Normandie (France)
 - Eastleigh Borough Council (UK)
 - Maison de l’Emploi et de la Formation Professionnelle du Pays de Brest (France)
 - Association ADICE (France)
 - Aspex Visual Arts Trust (UK)
 - Plymouth and District Mind (UK)
 - GIP FCIP de l’académie de Caen (France)
 - WSX Enterprise (UK)
 - Digital Peninsula Network (UK)
4. Project approval is subject to the Grant Offer Letter being signed.
5. Useful web links:
 - www.innovationcci.port.ac.uk
 - www.innovationcci.port.ac.uk/pontoon
 - www.innovationcci.port.ac.uk/team
 - www.interreg5a-fce.eu