Future of manufacturing

Global Growth Competencies –
Internationalisation policy measure
(Denmark)

Born globals and their value chains
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1. Context

Global Growth Competencies (GVK) is a measure for SMEs in the Region of Southern Denmark. The measure provides competencies and training for small businesses to internationalise their activities. The Region of Southern Denmark has a population of approximately 1.2 million, consists of 22 municipalities and one university – The University of Southern Denmark. The region is employing around 25,000 people within the private and public sector. The private sector consists of both large and small enterprises. Some of the largest enterprises are Dong Energy A/S, Danfoss A/S, Lego Systems A/S.

1.1. Circumstances in which the measure was introduced, rationale, and relevance

The introduction of GVK should be seen in the context of the Region of Southern Denmark’s Growth Strategy 2020 because the strategy sets the direction and focus areas for the region’s investment in new initiatives and measures, which means that the GVK measure was initiated during the implementation of the strategy. It mainly focuses on the challenging and lagging productivity growth, which was pointed out by the OECD (2012). The report highlights that the region needs to go beyond the EU-funded programmes (for example, Interreg programmes) to better integrate international networks of firm relationship and knowledge flows. The GVK measure was launched in 2015 by Tietgenskolen Odense Business College as the lead partner in a partnership with seven educational institutions and Business Development Centre – Southern Denmark (Væksthus Syddanmark). The introduction of the measure was therefore a result of an application to the Growth Forum (Vækstforum) in the Region of Southern Denmark. The Growth Forum is a regional body that implements the regional Growth Strategy 2020 by approving initiatives and activities for co-financing from EU structural funds, as well as from the region’s own development funds. Any public/private actor in the region can apply for new initiatives and activities for co-financing to the Growth Forum, but they will only be approved if the objectives in the activities are aligned with the regional Growth Strategy 2020 and its thematic areas within health, sustainable energy and experience economy (when businesses orchestrate memorable events for their customers, and that memory itself becomes the product — the ‘experience’). The areas are seen as regional strongholds and potentials in the regional growth strategy 2020 ‘Erhverv i udvikling’.

In this context, the measure is designed to provide new international competencies within foreign market analysis, sale, language/culture etc. to boost the region’s growth potential through increased export to the international market for small and medium-sized enterprises.

1.2. The process of developing the measure

To launch the measure the lead partner applied for funding to the Regional Growth Forum in June 2015 and the measure had its official start in October 2015. The Regional Growth Forum publishes ongoing application rounds within the specific priority objectives. The application of the GVK measure followed priority one in the programme for the European Social Fund 2014-2020: Entrepreneurship and job creation. Following this priority, the objective is to increase the number of self-employed and the success rates by improving competencies of SMEs through education and training (Danish Business Authority, 2014, p. 18). The measure provides skills and competencies to staff and management in internationalisation matters, as explained in section two.

Moreover, the measure builds on the experiences from the former measure ‘Innovative Globalisation Agent’ (IGA), which ended in March 2015. IGA’s goal was to contribute to exports and growth of SMEs in Southern Denmark through the supply of skilled labour for companies to hedge the company’s globalisation potential and to upgrade the skills of existing employees. Because IGA was very successful, as demonstrated in an evaluation (Tietgen International, 2015) the GVK measure is designed in a similar setup by the same partners. The main difference between the measures refers to
their target groups: while IGA only targeted unemployed academic graduates, GVK mainly addresses the employees in SMEs and unemployed academic graduates.

1.3. Any changes in policy context over time
Due to the relatively short timeline since its official start in October 2015, there have not been any changes in the policy context over time, as also confirmed by the project manager of GVK in the interview. The regional growth strategy has furthermore not changed since the development of the GVK measure and will continue until October 2019.

1.4. Evidence of complementarity and/or overlap between the measure and other policy measures
As of June 2017, there are no clear signs that the specific objectives and activities in the measure overlap with other policy measures in the Region of Southern Denmark. However, at national level, the policy measure Vitus by the Danish Trade Council also helps SMEs to kick-start export activities through workshops and coaching. The main difference is though the delivery mechanism of the measure, because GVK provides education and training which is more tailored and aimed at both staff and management in the SMEs.

Within the Region of Southern Denmark there is also a similar measure called ‘KOMPAS’, which aims to increase growth of SMEs through a series of training activities for the participating businesses, and within the same areas as GVK – health and welfare innovation, energy and the experience economy. KOMPAS was launched a year before GVK through the same Regional Growth Forum and funded by EU Structural Funds and regional development funds. Even though the methods used in KOMPAS are very similar – providing training and education – the focus point is different. While the GVK measure directly aims at strengthening the SMEs’ international profile, KOMPAS’ aim is more generally to upgrade the employees to make better strategic decisions and execute the strategies in order to create more value and growth in general – without a specific internationalisation focus. The training and education provided by GVK focus especially on the SMEs’ ability to make strategic decisions regarding the international market and execute the.

2. Content

2.1. Objectives of the measure
The goal of GVK is to contribute to growth and increased exports among SMEs within three focus areas 1) Sustainable energy, 2) Health and social innovation, and 3) Experience economy.

The measure has the following output targets to be provided within the four-year period:

- Number of supported SMEs: 150
- Number of managers and employees from the participating SMEs that undertake training courses and thereby increase their skills in international related matters: 770
- Number of graduates matched with the participating SMEs and hence supplying the SMEs with new competencies: 168.

In qualitative terms, it is expected that the new skills and training courses provided to the staff as well as the supply of new competencies from graduates will strengthen the international outlook within the participating SMEs.

2.2. General description of the measure
GVK is a four-year initiative that provides new skills and competencies to staff and management in the form of training and competency addition from an unemployed graduate in international related
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matters. The focus is on business development, internationalisation and increased exports in SMEs through the provision of knowledge. The educational and training activities are tailored to the relevant export market – mainly directed at geographically close markets (Norway, Sweden, Finland and Germany) and secondarily at other international markets, if it is assessed to be a potential for some of the participating SMEs. This means that the provision of training and education is tailored to the participating SMEs and specific market(s).

A partnership of relevant players within the region provides the skills and competencies to the SME. The partnership consists of a lead partner Tietgenskolen Odense Business College and six other educational institutions: (UC Lillebælt, UC Syddanmark, Erhvervsakademiet Lillebælt, Erhvervsakademiet SydVest, Svendborg Erhvervsskole, Syddansk Erhvervsskole) and Business Development Centre – Southern Denmark (Væksthus Syddanmark) together with local business services and clusters that are specialised in specific areas (see section 4 for more information).

The measure has two possible tracks. The main purpose of track one is to upgrade relevant key employees with new international competencies in order for the staff and the company to gain access to foreign markets. This includes an initial process where a business consultant and the company uncover the need for new competencies in regard to the growth strategy and the potential to grow on the international market. The training course is then planned so it fits into the context of the company in terms of business topics and skills that should be learned and also the time schedule of the training session. According to the project manager, each training course and its content is tailored to the specific need of each participating company. A training course could include training in market analysis, sales and marketing, cross-cultural management, communication and language, among others.

Track two is optional and means that the company is supplied with new skills externally in the form of a business consultant and/or recruitment of an unemployed graduate. The assigned business consultant will review, in collaboration with the company, the needs and desire to strengthen its international profile and further explore how the company can leverage the needs. The purpose to recruit an unemployed graduate is to help with specific tasks with focus on internationalisation, business development and increased export that takes place approximately six months.

2.3. Available budget

The total budget for the measure is approximately €3.1 million, which is partly funded by EU Structural Funds and partly self-funding by the SMEs and the partnership group. EU Structural Funds is a subsidy scheme which provides up to 50% support for project eligible costs. In addition, projects funded by the EU Structural Funds must be matched by a corresponding Danish 50% co-financing. According to the table below, the main self-financing is covered by the participating SMEs (49.89%). The partnership group will cover the remaining 0.11% of the budget.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Funding</th>
<th>Euro</th>
<th>Percent</th>
<th>More details</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>EU Structural Funds</td>
<td>€1,555,869.37</td>
<td>50%</td>
<td>European Social Fund</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Self-funding</td>
<td>€3,523.40</td>
<td>0.11%</td>
<td>Public self-funding from the partnership group</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Self-funding</td>
<td>€1,552,345.97</td>
<td>49.89%</td>
<td>Self-funding from the participating SMEs</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Total eligible costs</td>
<td>€3,111,738.74</td>
<td>100%</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Note: Currency converter: €1 = DKK 7.43653
Source: Syddansk Vækstforum (2015)
The programme involves legal state aid in regards of EU de minimis ‘state aid’ regulation. This means that each participating company can receive up to €200,000 in de minimis support within a three-year financial period. It is estimated that the GVK measure total funding respects these conditions.

2.4. Target groups of the measure

The definition of SME in the measure follows the definition in the EC recommendation concerning the definition of SMEs (EC, 2003), where the main factors are determined by:

- Staff headcount < 250
- Turnover ≤ €50 million or balance sheet total ≤ €43 million.

Moreover, only SMEs in the Region of Southern Denmark are eligible to participate in the programme, because it is funded from the region’s Growth Forum. The measure expects to target 150 SMEs, which are either already conducting export-oriented activities or planning to launch exports. The SME must conceive their business within the fields of sustainable energy, health and social innovation, or experience industries (whereby no respective NACE sectors are specified in the programme). The admitted companies are selected on the basis of whether they are willing to invest adequate time and resources into integrating the training on international business into their operations, and whether the business is working with one of the three focus areas in the measure.

Another important support from the GVK measure is the assistance in recruitment processes. The suitable highly skilled graduate candidates are identified by the partners in collaboration with the local job centre in the region as they have a comprehensive overview of unemployed group of people in the region. The candidate will be hired on a fixed-term contract of approx. six months in a subsidised position where the municipality provides the firm with a subsidy of €10.29 per hour towards the cost of the salary. A relevant graduate is defined as person who holds a long or medium-cycle higher education (approximately three and a half to five years). Before the graduate begins working for one of the SMEs, he or she will go through a six-week intensive training course at one of the educational institutions in the partnership group in order to get prepared to use their academic competencies in the company. According to the project manager, this process is especially important in regards graduates on master level or above master level as the SMEs in the programme typically have not had any graduates within their workforce and therefore need to learn how to utilise the new competencies. The graduates are selected within the fields of different academic areas such as art, communication, social science, economics and the many fields within engineering. The project manager also stressed that the most important competencies that the partners are looking for are the person’s abilities to think analytically, understand complex situations and communicate them. Communication skills are particularly important for many SMEs as they strive to strengthen their internationalisation capabilities.

3. Relevance of the measure to SMEs/born globals and internationalisation

3.1. Relevance in relation to different types and stages of internationalisation

The measure is relevant to the SMEs/born globals in general and not particularly in any specific stages and types of internationalisation (even if there is some implicit focus on exports). The provision of new competencies both internally among employees and through the recruitment of a graduate supports the enterprise whether the company is mainly focused on the initial entry stage or already has some export activity. However, the majority of the participating SMEs are in the beginning of their internationalisation process and, according to the project manager, the measure is also very relevant for SMEs that are preparing their first entry to an international market because it delivers support to create some fundamental preparations such as an international strategy that highlight some of the

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company’s main needs related to entering new markets. It is estimated by the project manager that the majority of the participating SMEs have been set up in the past five to six years, especially the enterprises within the business area of experience economy.

3.2. Support for cooperation between SMEs/born globals and wider international collaboration (if any)

As of June 2017, the measure does not support cooperation between SMEs neither nationally nor internationally. Nonetheless, according to the project manager, attention is being paid to strengthen the cooperation nationally between the participating companies through advisory board meetings, where the companies have a platform to discuss and learn from each other and strengthen the networks that are in the GVK programme.

3.3. Contribution of the measure to tackle SMEs’/born globals’ internationalisation support needs

The measure is used for supporting SMEs in the Region of Southern Denmark in their endeavours to entering and gaining a successful market position on foreign markets. This includes support to overcome barriers to new markets such as identifying export opportunities, overcoming language barriers and understanding the culture and business approaches within the foreign market.

4. The operation of the measure

4.1. Promotion of the measure to internationalising businesses

Relevant SMEs in the Region of Southern Denmark get access to the measure through the partners’ marketing and the partners’ networks in the local business community. According to the project manager the partners have a comprehensive overview of the relevant enterprises in the region and hence can reach the relevant target group themselves. The measure is disseminated through personal contacts and the GVK measure webpage. The promotion of the measure has not changed over time.

4.2. The process of application and assessment of applications

The entry for SMEs into the GVK measure is not going through a formal application and assessment process. Instead, there is an initial dialogue between the company and a business consultant from the partnership group before the companies enter the tracks in the measure. The purpose of this dialogue is to assess whether the SME agrees to investing time and resources and has an international outlook. During this initial dialogue the company must provide some formal documents indicating economic performance and sign the de minimis statement.

4.3. Delivery mechanism of the measure

The GVK measure provides new capabilities to SMEs by implementing competency development courses for the staff with focus on areas that can help strengthen the companies’ international profiles and thereby access to and success in foreign markets. As soon as SMEs enter the GVK measure, the partners begin uncovering the needs regarding the skills’ improvement of key employees and the ongoing dialogue and counselling. The starting point of the dialogue between the SME and the consultant from one of the partners (either from one of the educational institutions or the business development centre) is based on the Strategic Globalisation Tool that serves as an instrument to clarify the competency and business development needs in order to increase growth and mature the SME’s globalisation readiness. The tool consists of a spiderweb of four overall themes with underlying focus areas such as sales and marketing, local relations, corporate communication and cross culture management etc. The themes provide a guiding tool for the company to identify areas where the company needs to improve their work to increase growth and readiness for the global market.

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This is initialised without any direct costs for the SME. The only investment at this stage is the management’s and employees’ allocation of time to the project. However, the SME can choose to continue the training courses and thereby extend the group of employees/management that needs upgrading of skills. If they choose to continue, the company will co-finance the costs of the training course.

In track two the measure opens up the opportunity to supply external expertise in form of a graduate recruit or business consultant who can give business advice and help solve specific tasks with a global edge. In the beginning the SME will invest their time in order to develop the international strategy and identify/describe the specific task that the graduate will help with. The SME can choose to continue the supply of external expertise. If they choose to do so, the company needs to pay the costs of the external business consulting, and the subsidised salary from the municipality to the recruitment of a graduate will stop.

The measures are delivered by the educational partners of GVK. They mainly provide education and training, but they are also taking part in the marketing to raise awareness of the GVK measure in the region. Besides their role in the measure the educational institutions offer higher education programmes to graduates and professionals, which means that they have the personnel and resources (that is, facilities and training materials) to provide the necessary training. The specific role of each institution in the GVK measure depends on their area of expertise, some mainly apply research and education in the fields of health and social innovation and others within sustainable energy and the experience industry. The partners do not have an exclusive focus on internationalisation but are to some extent equipped to support SMEs for internationalisation due to their international profile in the specific educational programmes.

The Business Development Centre – Southern Denmark is in general responsible for business support in the Region of Southern Denmark, which means that their main role in the measure is to coordinate the recruitment of SMEs in collaboration with the other partners and thereby reach out to the relevant SMEs in the region. The Business Development Centre cooperates with a large network across several business areas and is therefore the region’s shortcut to a large network.
4.4. Administration of the measure

The GKV measure is administered by a lead partner, Tietgenskolen Odense Business College, which is in charge of the overall leadership and management of the measure, including coordinating activities, secretory services to the other partners, and provision and dissemination of relevant knowledge and information to partners, SMEs, stakeholders such as the job centre or the external business consultants. According to the project manager, it is also the lead partner’s role to help those educational institutions that do not have internationalisation for business as their main activity, for example, by acquiring specialised export competencies from management consultants.

The lead partner is furthermore responsible for the reporting and accounting to the secretary of the Region’s Growth Forum, which has approved the funding from the EU Structural Funds to the measure. In each of the other partners there is a local project manager who is responsible for reporting the number of activities and resources spent in the measure back to the lead partner. The lead partner will then collect and coordinate the process to report to the secretary of the Regional Growth Forum.

5. Monitoring and evaluation

5.1. Monitoring of the implementation and take-up of the measure: method and contents

One of the conditions for obtaining full funding from the Regional Growth Forum is that the activities of the measure are monitored and documented on a half-year basis to the secretary of the Regional Growth Forum, starting at latest one year after the outset. The Regional Growth Forum monitors the progress of the measure on specific output objectives: number of participating SMEs and number of professionals with increased competencies after participation as well as number of graduates who have been recruited by an SME.

The latest documents from the secretariat of the Regional Growth Forum in 2016 (Vækstforumsekretariat, 2016) show that the measure is well underway but has met a number of challenges in the start-up phase. It means that the measure is lagging behind in terms of recruitment of SMEs, implementation of competence courses and the recruitment of unemployed graduates. The specific numbers that illustrate to what extent the measure is lagging behind are not made publicly available. However, according to the project manager interviewed, the project has intensified the recruitment activities and expects to catch up. The main reasons for the limited progress of the activities are that there have been some changes in the managerial organisation in the first year, and SMEs are very busy, which affects their ability to participate in the project.

5.2. Evaluation of the measure: methods and contents

So far there has not been any attempt to evaluate the measure since it was only introduced in October 2015, but the consulting firm COWI is in charge to carry out a mid-term evaluation in September 2017 and a final evaluation in June 2019. The evaluations will assess whether the measure has managed to provide activities where the participating companies have translated and applied the new competencies in the daily work as well as making an estimation of the results regarding job creation and estimated effects on revenue and export effects within the participating companies.

As explained in section 1.2, the measure is designed in a similar setup as ‘Innovative Globalisation Agent’ (IGA), which was evaluated in 2015. The evaluation showed that the project had a positive effect: 70% of the participating companies expressed to be satisfied or very satisfied with having participated in the project. The participating companies also reported in the evaluation that 22% of their future growth expectation can be accredited to the measure’s activities.
5.3. Any changes to the content or delivery of the measure following monitoring and evaluation
As explained by the project manager the partners have intensified the effort to reach out to relevant SMEs in the region by contacting more SMEs and academic graduates in collaboration with academics’ Unemployment Insurance Fund.

6. Evidence of outcomes and impact

6.1. Evolution of the measure’s spending
Besides the overall budget, there are no data available to see the measure’s spending over time. Nonetheless, according to the project manager, most of the budget is spent in the first phases (initial dialogue and preparation of the tailored programme for skill upgrading) of the measure, where the companies develop their international profile and strategy. When the staff and management of the company take part in the actual programme as well as recruit an academic graduate, the measure’s spending will eventually move towards zero because the participating companies will increase their self-financing in the programme.
The unbalance in the measure’s spending (higher spending in the initial dialogue and preparation of the educational programme) is accepted as a condition in the measure’s nature. However, it is crucial that the budget is balanced when the project ends, and the SMEs have increased their self-financing for taking part in the planned training courses.

6.2. The quantitative and qualitative outcomes of the measure
There are no publicly available quantitative outcomes of the measure due to the young age of the measure and its pending evaluation.

6.3. Impact of the measure on its beneficiaries and other actors
According to the interview with the project manager, the measure is expected to have a long-term effect as internationalisation competences are brought into the SMEs, allowing them for a more sustainable strategy and implementation of internationalisation activities than, for example, a one-off financial export subsidy might.

6.4 Evidence of economic and employment impact
Until the mid-term evaluation is published in September 2017, there are no data available on the output or benefit for the participating companies. However, in terms of more qualitative evidence for the participating academics, it is understood by the project manager that the measure provides new experiences and knowledge concerning globalisation, presentation technique, communication and innovation for the academic. It also provides inspiration regarding SME-focused job search and improved CV, experience, network and a commercial – and SME oriented – vocabulary for the academic.

7. Strengths and weaknesses of the measure

7.1. Strengths of the measure
There are several strengths of the measure. One of them is that it was built following a similar instrument in the Region of Southern Denmark, which has shown to be a great success in providing competencies and training of staff and management in internationalisation related matters. It is the
same partnership group and therefore they are used to working together within the scope of internationalisation and supporting businesses to access new markets.

According to the project manager, another strength is the measure’s flexibility in terms of customising the competence-building activities to the individual company’s needs. The activities are not determined by general educational goals and structures, which means that each training course can be tailored to the individual international strategy and export goals. When the specific needs are determined in the initial dialogue and preparation between the SME and a partner from the measure’s partner group, the competence developing activities at the educational institutions will reflect this plan. It is a strength in terms of delivery to the company due to the tailored approach to the SMEs that matches the specific needs for new learnings such as market analysis, sales and marketing, cross-cultural management, communication among others.

7.2. Weaknesses of the measure

In the interview with the project manager, it was stressed that the administrative burden can be seen as a weakness in the measure. However, the administrative tasks such as time registration on a monthly basis for the partners and SMEs in the project is a condition that is not changeable due to the fact that it is a publicly funded project. Another weakness that can be stressed in regards of the ability to internationalise is the lack of support given to cooperation between enterprises and other relevant actors internationally. However, it is not a specific goal of the measure and cannot be evaluated as such, but can be seen as a limitation to the scope of the measure.

7.3. Evidence of policy learning over time

According to the project manager and desk research there is no evidence that the measure has inspired similar instruments in other regions of Denmark nor in any other country. However, as stressed by the project manager, there is great potential in transferring the measure to other regions in Denmark and similarly to other European regions with SMEs in need of new international competencies in order to leverage the export potential in the region.

In order to implement the measure in another region some essential part of the measure needs to be in place besides a financial support scheme like from the Regional Growth Forum. According to the project manager, it is crucial that there is a close working relationship between the different partners in the measure because the success of the activities relies on different and complementary approaches and competencies of the partners. For example, the job centre is crucial to identify and recruit relevant candidates to supply the SMEs with new competencies. Another crucial part is the close connection and network between the companies in the region because it can be difficult to recruit relevant SMEs. In the case of GVK, a partnership with the Business Development Centre in the region is important due to the large network across several business areas and extensive experiences in assisting entrepreneurs and SMEs with growth and development of their business.

8. Recommendations

8.1. Overall recommendations regarding the measure

As stressed by the project manager, it can be difficult to prepare the graduates to engage in SMEs in general. Typically, they do not consider SMEs their ideal work place and instead they are interested in pursuing careers within larger private companies and public bodies such as municipalities, agencies and ministries. From a SMEs’ perspective, it can sometimes be difficult to recognise the potential of a graduate if they are not used to employing personnel with academic degrees. Therefore, for a successful integration of both parties, it is important to match some of the skills that the graduates have with the specific needs and desire for internationalisation and export that the company elaborates in the initial phase of the measure, and before the graduates join the companies.
Another recommendation is to expand the scope of the measure, because the measure does not support network activities among the participating companies and with other relevant actors national or internationally. The lack of support to networking activities can be stressed as a limitation of the measure’s ability to support the SMEs’ international outlook and success to gain foothold in new markets because the SMEs will not necessarily increase their international network through the measure.

8.2. Recommendations on the national support system for SME/born global internationalisation

In Denmark, there are several business promotion opportunities for SMEs. However, as stressed by the project manager, many of the opportunities do not create enough value for the individual company because the delivery mechanism of the support and the content of the measure often is limited by a strict methodology in terms of activity and tools. In regard to the GVK measure, each support activity is tailored to the company specific needs for internationalisation and is not subjected to predefined specified educational goals. Therefore, the support is very flexible and a more integrated part of the enterprise’s operations and culture, even after the participation in the measure ends.

8.3. Any gaps in the provision of policy support and suggestions

N/a.
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References

All Eurofound publications are available at www.eurofound.europa.eu


EC (2003), Commission Recommendation of 6 May 2003 concerning the definition of micro, small and medium-sized enterprises, 2003/361/EC.


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