ACTION PLAN

Proposed for UNICORN QUEST – PP02 SIEA

Appendix 1- Action plan for policy improvement - template

This template is automatically integrated in the last progress report of the core phase. It appears in the 'Results' for regions which haven't yet demonstrated any policy improvement.

Policy context

1/ Policy instrument addressed
Does the action plan address the initial policy instrument addressed in the application form?

☐ **Yes** ☐ ~~No~~

If no, please provide the features of the new policy instrument(s) addressed:
(see description of a policy instrument in the application form)

2/ What kind of improvements do you envisage for this instrument?

- ~~New projects financed through the instrument ☐~~
- ~~Change in the management of the instrument ☐~~
- **Revision of the instrument itself ☐**

Details of the action(s) envisaged

ACTION X:

Name of the action: Enhancing the Strategic and Operational Delivery of Startup Support through Interregional Learning

1. Relevance to the project
(please describe how this action derives from the project and in particular from the interregional exchange of experience. Where does the inspiration for this action come from?)

This action derives directly from the interregional exchange of experience within UnicornQuest, which provided a strategic platform for analyzing successful European support models. The primary inspiration comes from the **Irish PREP4SEED Investor Readiness program**, which provides a blueprint for a structured 12-week mentoring cycle covering critical growth fundamentals such as financial modeling, sales strategies, and investor pitch preparation. This

model demonstrated the value of combining group masterclasses with tailored one-to-one mentoring to move startups rapidly from technical excellence to market readiness.

Further inspiration is drawn from the **Latvian and Portuguese Innovation Voucher models**, which demonstrate a transition from rigid, slow-moving grant schemes to agile, demand-driven delivery mechanisms. These systems utilize vouchers as "letters of guarantee" that immediately connect entrepreneurs with specialized knowledge providers, drastically reducing the administrative risk and time-lag associated with traditional state aid.

Additionally, the project integrated insights from the **French Bioteos case study**, which highlighted the necessity of supporting domestic Proof of Concept (POC) and validation stays. By observing how French startups utilized local infrastructure for initial pilot testing, SIEA advocated for expanding Component 3 of the Slovak scheme to include domestic training and validation stays stays.

Collectively, these inspirations have shifted the Slovak Startup Support Scheme (DM 49/2024) from a static "service provider" model toward an agile, voucher-led ecosystem better aligned with the fast-paced needs of high-potential innovations.

2. Nature of the action

(please describe the content of action 1 precisely. What are the specific activities to be implemented?)

The action consists of the following specific activities to be implemented:

• Good Practice Analysis: Detailed review of acceleration and mentoring formats (e.g., pitch preparation from WestBIC) to identify transferable elements.
• Voucher System Integration: Transitioning from direct procurement of services to a voucher-led ecosystem, as piloted in Amendment No. 1.
• Stakeholder Consultation: Systematic feedback loops with the startup community and SAPIE (Slovak Alliance for Innovation Economy) to validate the relevance of new eligibility criteria (e.g., pricing, prototype testing).
• Policy Recommendations: Drafting final strategic updates for the Ministry of Economy to ensure the scheme's long-term alignment with international competitiveness.

3. Stakeholders involved

(please indicate the organisations in the region which are involved in the implementation of the action and explain their role)

Ministry of Economy of the SR: Decision-maker and strategic authority.
• SIEA: Strategic partner responsible for integrating project results into policy.

• Slovak Business Agency (SBA): Implementing body responsible for launching calls and operational management.

• Ministry of Economy of the Slovak Republic – Decision-maker and strategic authority
The Ministry of Economy of the Slovak Republic acts as the principal decision-making body and overall strategic authority for the initiative. It is responsible for setting the long-term vision, defining policy priorities, and ensuring alignment with national economic and innovation strategies. The Ministry provides political leadership, approves key milestones and funding allocations, and ensures that project outcomes contribute to strengthening Slovakia's competitiveness, innovation performance, and business environment. It also represents the initiative at governmental level and in communication with European institutions where relevant.

• Slovak Innovation and Energy Agency (SIEA) – Strategic partner for policy integration
SIEA serves as a strategic partner with a strong focus on ensuring that project outputs are effectively translated into public policy measures and systemic improvements. Its role includes analytical support, evaluation of pilot results, and formulation of recommendations for legislative or regulatory adjustments. SIEA facilitates the integration of best practices into existing innovation and energy support schemes, thereby enhancing policy coherence and long-term sustainability of the initiative's results.

• Slovak Business Agency (SBA) – Implementing and operational body
The Slovak Business Agency acts as the main implementing authority responsible for the operational delivery of the project. This includes preparing and launching public calls, managing application and evaluation processes, contracting beneficiaries, and overseeing financial and administrative compliance. SBA ensures transparent selection procedures, provides methodological guidance to applicants, and monitors the progress and impact of supported activities. It plays a crucial role in translating strategic objectives into concrete support instruments for entrepreneurs and startups.

• Slovak Alliance for Innovation Economy (SAPIE) – Representative of the startup ecosystem
SAPIE represents the interests of the Slovak startup and innovation community within the initiative. It provides expert validation, structured feedback, and practical insights from founders, investors, and ecosystem stakeholders. By acting as a bridge between policymakers and the startup community, SAPIE helps ensure that support mechanisms reflect real market needs, remove barriers to growth, and foster a competitive and innovation-friendly environment. Its involvement strengthens stakeholder engagement, transparency, and the overall relevance of the initiative.

4. Timeframe

(please specify the timing envisaged for the action)

The action is divided into milestones starting from December 2024 with a final implementation deadline of August 2026.

2024
1. Stakeholder engagement and knowledge transfer
Engage stakeholders and share expertise collected from interregional exchanges.
2. Selection of good practices
Engage stakeholders and identify relevant good practices based on shared experience.
3. Integration of best practices into stakeholder calls
Adapt and embed relevant practices into the design of future stakeholder calls.

2025
4. Projects evaluation and awarding (design phase)
Adapt and embed relevant practices into the design of future SBA calls.

2026
5. Projects evaluation and awarding (implementation phase)
Evaluate project proposals and award support to selected startups.
6. Implementation and monitoring
Implement supported projects and monitor their progress and results.

5. Indicative costs and source of funding *(if applicable, please estimate the costs related to the implementation of action 1)*

The estimated amounts are derived from the official financial allocations for the Startup Support Scheme (de minimis aid scheme DM – 49/2024).

• Cumulative Amount (€4,000,000): This represents the total estimated budget for the entire duration of the scheme (2024–2026). The project's interregional learning and the subsequent adoption of Amendment No. 1) structurally revised the delivery mechanism of this entire fund, transitioning it toward a voucher-led system.

• Current Period Amount (€800,000): This figure is based on the specific 2025 Call for Proposals, which has directly allocated €800,000 for the "Program for the support of startups". This allocation will be executed under the new, more flexible rules and expanded eligible activities (such as pricing and prototype testing) identified as priorities during the project.

• Annual Budget Context: The broader scheme documents estimate a yearly budget of €1,500,000 for 2025 and €1,500,000 for 2026, totaling the projected €4 million over the three-year lifecycle.