

How to design an online course



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Description of authoring organisation:

The Green European Foundation (GEF) is a European-level political foundation whose mission is to contribute to a lively European sphere of debate and to foster greater involvement by citizens in European politics. GEF strives to mainstream discussions on European policies and politics both within and beyond the Green political family.

The foundation acts as a laboratory for new ideas, offers cross-border political education and a platform for cooperation and exchange at the European level.

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Introduction

The Green European Foundation (GEF) promotes education and training and provide opportunities for building capacity and encouraging networking among Green actors across Europe.

Our aim is to raise awareness among citizens about Green solutions to the challenges Europe faces, and to enhance the ability of activists, politicians and citizens to work on issues with a European dimension.

To this end, we have initiated an online learning programme which complements our face-to-face trainings and uses the potential of digital tools to bring together European actors to learn, discuss and expand their networks.

- ▶ **Objective:** After a successful experience in implementing an online learning programme, we have developed this guide to empower other organisations interested in online education to develop their own courses.
- ▶ **Target group:** This guide is aimed at Green organisations, Green parties, civil society initiatives, educational institutions or any other actors interested in developing online courses as tools for political education.
- ▶ **Methodology:** The structure of the guide follows the entire process of developing an online course – [preparation](#), [production](#), [testing](#), [launch and follow up](#). Each chapter of this guide is dedicated to one of the main stages in the process of developing an online course and contains:
 - ▶ **Practical information** on the main elements to keep in mind during the respective stage of developing your course;
 - ▶ **Case studies**  in which we share best practice based on the GEF-Greens/EFA online course “IMPACT EUROPE: Online Course for Green Activists” as the example;
 - ▶ **Tip boxes**  as additional advice from our team on implementing specific aspects of the course;
 - ▶ **Expert advice**  provided by online learning experts, content managers and audio-visual specialists.

If you want to see how online courses develop through this process, create a free account at mygreenlearning.eu!

Stage 1

Get started

The first key step in building an online course is to specify the challenge it is addressing, to define its users and its main objectives. In other words, you need to start by formulating a clear idea of what the course is about, why it is relevant and who it is for. These basic elements will guide your shaping of the course framework and help you make other significant decisions along the way. So, let's get started!



State the challenge

Start by formulating the **challenge statement**, which is the answer to the following *main questions*:

- ▶ Why is there a need for an online course on the subject you plan to address?
- ▶ What is the context of your course?
- ▶ What issue(s) will it address?
- ▶ Why is this relevant and who will benefit from it?

Try to structure it as a general introduction about your course in which you provide a short presentation about its aims and relevance as an educational tool. Think of stating the problem as a short presentation of the course in response to the challenge you would like to address.

To define the scope of your course, we recommend surveying the potential learners on these 'big questions'. You will find more information about conducting tests and surveys in Stage 4 and 6.

CASE STUDY: CHALLENGE STATEMENT FROM IMPACT EUROPE

"Enthusiastic activists are a driving force for the Green movement in Europe and beyond. Providing information and training on European policies in a Green context, as well as networking opportunities for young people with ambition to change Europe to the better, is part of the Green European Foundation and the Greens/EFA's missions and is a key element in promoting the participation of young people in European politics.

The online course therefore aims at providing accessible and interactive education on the European Union, keeping in mind a critical and Green perspective, to encourage active citizenship, potential Green votes and Green activism."

Find your partners

Once you have decided what your online course is about, you will need to identify potential partners who will be able to help you bring it to life. Try to find experts and external consultants who will be able to provide extra resources, feedback and technical support. It is very useful to contact experts who can contribute with valuable advice and additional knowledge relevant to the content of your course (i.e. professionals and academics working in the specific area).

Furthermore, search for technical support and specialists who will provide necessary services that cannot be delivered internally by your organisation (i.e. IT experts, designers, video editors and producers, voiceover companies, etc.).

You can also search for collaborators within your own network who would be interested in contributing to the course, providing feedback and promoting it among potential learners.

Know your target group

At the very beginning, it is also necessary to define who the participants of your online course will be, as well as to identify their learning needs.

This means that from the very start, understanding the potential users of the course can be highly beneficial for shaping the direction of the project. Therefore, we recommend conducting an analysis of the users and their needs in which you consider the following characteristics:

- ▶ **Age:** What age group will your course be developed for and why?
- ▶ **Geography:** What is the project's geographic scope – local, regional, national or transnational? Do participants live in the same or several countries? Do they reside in urban or rural areas?
- ▶ **Language:** Which language is optimal for communicating the course content to the participants? If language is a challenge, perhaps it is advisable to develop the course based on visual elements which are not dependent on a specific language.
- ▶ **Education:** What educational levels should your course cater for? What would this mean in practice, in terms of conveying and presenting information? Is it a beginners' or advanced course?

- ▶ **Employment:** What are their employment profiles? What might this mean for their participation in the course, in terms of duration and availability?
- ▶ **Interests:** What topics are relevant to their interests? What information do they find engaging and what would they find boring or outdated?
- ▶ **Lifestyle:** What are the interesting aspects of how they live, receive information and interact with other people? How do they use technology and digital media? Is online learning suitable for them?
- ▶ **Availability:** Bearing other characteristics in mind, such as studies, jobs and lifestyle, try to determine how much time they would spend on online learning on a daily or weekly basis and how long would it take them to complete your course.
- ▶ **Motivation:** What are the main benefits of your course that would motivate them to participate? What are the 'hooks'; the elements that would attract them to explore the course, in terms of topics, formats, technical features, etc.?

The profile of your potential learners, their behavioural characteristics and needs should influence two important aspects of the course in particular: its learning goals and learning style, which are developed in the next stage.

CASE STUDY: TARGET GROUP OF IMPACT EUROPE

The main audience for our course is represented by young people aged between 16 and 30 years old. With this age group's needs and expectations in mind, we developed the project as a beginner's course and identified engagement and interactivity as our target group's most important needs. Following the results of our user analysis, we divided the target group into two profiles presented on the next page.

TIP BOX: DO A "PERSONA" EXERCISE

To successfully analyse the target group, we recommend carrying out an exercise in which you attempt to visualise the users in the form of a single individual who embodies their main behavioural characteristics. In this exercise, give a name to the 'persona' and list their age, attitudes, needs and expectations from your course. Try to keep the profile of the persona in mind while setting out the objectives and framework of your course.

The “ENGAGED”:

WHO they are:

- ▶ 16 to 30 years old
- ▶ High school or university education
- ▶ Already interested in Green issues
- ▶ Not knowledgeable in terms of European policies
- ▶ Active in NGOs/members of young Green organisations/interns for Green parties or the European Parliament.

WHAT they want:

- ▶ To understand the more complex aspects of EU policy
- ▶ Opportunities to discuss their ideas and develop arguments to consolidate their own opinions
- ▶ To gain international experience and contacts
- ▶ To improve their projects and employability

The “ENTHUSIASTIC”:

WHO they are:

- ▶ 16 to 30 years old
- ▶ High school or university education
- ▶ Interested in world events
- ▶ They wish to be involved with political issues but don't know how
- ▶ Open to Green ideas but don't consider themselves as Greens

WHAT they want:

- ▶ To get an idea on how to be part of the change they envisage for the world around them
- ▶ Opportunities to get involved, gain experience and develop themselves
- ▶ To become active and/or to enhance their employability

Set the course objectives

The objectives of your online course should further explain the purpose of the project, serve as a reference point during the rest of the course development, and provide a benchmark for evaluating the success of your course.

Therefore, the objectives should be **specific**: they need to clearly convey what the course is about; and **directive**: they should serve as instructions for the development of the course. When defining the main objectives, it is important to have in mind that they should reflect several points, such as:

- ▶ **Goals**: What is the course meant to provide or achieve?
- ▶ **Scope**: What is the educational focus of this course, in terms of the topics or issues it will address?
- ▶ **Relevance**: Why is this important and what does this course contribute to?

If your project encompasses many objectives, it is helpful to place them in a hierarchical list, i.e. by ordering them as primary and secondary.

CASE STUDY: IMPACT EUROPE'S COURSE OBJECTIVES

As an example, we can share the objectives set for our online course. The primary objectives of Impact Europe were:

- ▶ Providing **accessible and interactive education** on the EU (history, institutions, values, current challenges) and the role of Greens at the European level, as well as on ways in which activists can become engaged in a European context;
- ▶ **Complementing existing national trainings and capacity building** with high-quality and up-to-date content on the European eco-system;
- ▶ Presenting potentially 'dry' topics in a **modern and user-friendly manner**.

In addition, the secondary objectives were:

- ▶ Building an **alumni network** interested in working together on EU issues, getting involved as part of the Green movement or taking part in other GEF/ partners projects;
- ▶ Providing inputs which will contribute to **the future reflection on our education and training services**, by providing insights into the way activists engage with the content.

TIP BOX: ORGANISE A FOCUS GROUP

We organised a focus group as a way of brainstorming and gathering feedback with the project partners who helped us define the course objectives and our target group. If you are interested in organising a focus group, gather your partners in a workshop setting in which they can share their feedback and inputs about the course. Capture their ideas by using flipcharts and Post-it notes, and summarise their contributions in a report.

Stage 2: Design the learning experience

Before you start producing the actual content of your course, it is necessary to establish a framework as a foundation on which you can build the learning activities and materials.

The framework of your online course should be derived from the objectives of the project, the needs of your target group and the elements highlighted in the following stage.



Learning goals

Learning goals are a set of outcomes learners expect from the learning experience. Therefore, the main questions here are: what can learners expect to learn; and how will they benefit from completing your online course? In general, online learning has the potential as an education tool to:

- ▶ Enhance participants' knowledge about certain topics;
- ▶ Encourage critical thinking and arguments about specific issues;
- ▶ Provide flexibility and independence in terms of learning time;
- ▶ Put forward new learning formats in an online environment;
- ▶ Give access to additional resources – publications, websites, relevant actors, etc.;
- ▶ Promote other opportunities for further development and involvement in line with the main objectives of the course;
- ▶ Connect learners and build networks (i.e. alumni).

CASE STUDY: IMPACT EUROPE'S LEARNING GOALS

Here are the learning objectives from Impact Europe. By the end of the course, learners will be able to:

- ▶ Better argue their own ideas and views on what is “going on in the world” by including a European dimension in formulating their arguments;
- ▶ Recognise the role of EU institutions and procedures that work in areas of their interest;
- ▶ Acquire better access to resources by knowing where to find further information on EU issues that interest them;
- ▶ Identify ways to get involved in activities which might change the course of politics at the European level;
- ▶ Identify opportunities for further personal development and political involvement;
- ▶ Be part of a community of young activists, which will be created as an online alumni network at the end of the course.

Learning style

It might be useful to distinguish the general approach of your online course in terms of user participation. For example, this could be:

- ▶ **Synchronous learning** - in which all learners participate in the course at the same time, based on the schedule set up when the course is available (i.e. suitable when the online course replaces the typical classroom course held in an educational institution);
- ▶ **Asynchronous learning** - a more individual and independent approach, in which learners are active at different times during the period when the course is available (i.e. suitable when the online course is an independent project or outside the formal educational setting);
- ▶ **Blended learning** - in which the online course is an additional tool for face-to-face education (i.e. beneficial when it represents an additional education tool to existing classroom courses or educational projects).

Besides this general approach, it is beneficial to identify more specific aspects of the learning style that can ensure the best outcome in terms of user experience with the course. Therefore, the learning style needs to accommodate your target group's needs, expectations and abilities. In order to formulate this, several learning aspects have to be strategically planned at this stage of the course development, such as:

- ▶ **Level of difficulty:** Should it be designed as a beginner's or advanced course?
- ▶ **Duration:** How long should it take to complete the entire course? How about individual activities?
- ▶ **Flexibility:** How can a user navigate through the course? Is it compulsory to finish one learning activity in order to proceed to the next one, or are learners free to pick and choose from the course content?
- ▶ **Formats:** What are the most appropriate ways to present course topics?
- ▶ **Activities:** What are the most effective methods to learn about those topics?
- ▶ **Language:** How best to convey the information and communicate instructions?
- ▶ **Functionality:** What technical features does your course need to reflect user demands?
- ▶ **Visual design:** How to present the course in an optimum way?

EXPERT ADVICE: ED FRASER, ONLINE LEARNING CONSULTANT

"It is worth highlighting some of the costs and benefits of these different approaches.

Synchronous learning allows for a more direct sense of a 'class' of learners and is more likely to encourage social interaction within the course through comments/discussions. The challenge is making this available to participate in on demand – it often relies on the course not being available indefinitely. This is the learning style most commonly applied on MOOCs (Massive Open Online Courses).

Asynchronous learning allows for greater flexibility for the individual, but can make it more difficult to stimulate conversation between learners as they are studying at different points in time, more difficult to organise group-based tasks, and relies more heavily on the self-motivation of each learner.

Blended learning can be a happy medium between traditional and online learning styles, and can integrate synchronous activities into an asynchronous course. The greatest cost is logistics and resources, as it requires organising learners to attend a location at certain times, and the availability of 'educators' to support face-to-face experiences."

CASE STUDY: IMPACT EUROPE'S LEARNING STYLE

Online learning is used by GEF as a tool for capacity building and widening our reach beyond face-to-face transnational seminars across Europe. Therefore, both asynchronous and blended learning were applied to Impact Europe. First, the content was made available for a specific period of time, during which learners completed a 10-hour course at their own pace. The duration of the course was determined by the results of a survey in which we asked test learners how much time they would be willing to spend on such a course.

Secondly, our course is also used as an additional tool in our educational project, [European Green Activist Training](#), in which the participants join an online course as a preparatory activity for their study tour to Brussels. This project consists of training sessions for young Green activists in three phases: the first entails national trainings on domestic politics; the second entails taking part in our online course on European politics; and the third brings together the activists from different countries in Brussels to complement their training by experiencing the European political dimension first-hand.

Moreover, in response to the needs of our target group, we established a learning style appropriate for beginners and those with a basic level of knowledge about the three themes addressed by the course: the European Union, the Green movement, and activism. This also influenced the methodology, learning activities and the choice of an up-to-date hosting platform.



Methodology

The next step in developing an online course is to identify the learning methods that will best suit your learning objectives and your potential course participants. Here are some useful steps to keep in mind when deciding on the learning activities:

1 List the learning formats that are the most suitable as learning tools for your target audience in the context of your course. Here are several examples of formats for online learning:

- ▶ E-lectures
- ▶ Animated videos
- ▶ Interviews
- ▶ Infographics
- ▶ Images
- ▶ Charts/Slides
- ▶ Webinars
- ▶ Games
- ▶ E-readers
- ▶ Quizzes
- ▶ Essays/written assignments
- ▶ Forum assignments
- ▶ Practical assignments

If you are not sure what type of format is best suited for your audience, you can find out either by checking other successful courses and digital tools developed for a similar target group, or by organising a survey among your audience asking them what kind of content they use online.

2 Having determined the main formats which are likely to keep your learners engaged, take your time to study them and decide carefully which format best suits each learning objective in your course. Here is a quick guide to get you started:



ONLINE LEARNING - LEARNING FORMATS

ACTIVITY FORMAT	E-LECTURES	ANIMATED VIDEOS	INTERVIEW VIDEOS	INFOGRAPHICS	IMAGES	CHARTS/SLIDES	WEBINARS
Description	Similar to a classroom experience, a speaker presents chunks of information, directly addressing the audience. The speaker can be supported by visual aids (slides/graphs/images).	These are videos which use sequences of images and drawings which create the illusion of movement.	Video format based on filmed interviews with relevant speakers who are actively involved in the topic of the video and who can provide practical experience, critical opinion or more advanced insights into the given topic. These videos can be presented as a single interview or a combination of several speakers.	Presentations of facts and data about a certain topic that combines short text descriptions with visuals/illustrations, graphs and diagrams.	Photographs and illustrations	Short presentations of facts, arguments or most relevant points about a topic.	Learners participate in live interventions (lectures, debates) with expert speakers who provide advanced knowledge or critical insights into a topic.
When to Use	Audience: this is a rather conventional and 'safe' way to present content online. Thus, they are useful when the audience is also quite professional or conventional (non-digital native, business, etc.). Content: best used for content which is very interesting and engaging on its own.	Animated videos are one of the most engaging types of video, as the images shown on screen are created particularly to fit the objective and message of the video. This is a powerful story-telling method which is suitable for a large variety of instances.	When the narrators are those who 'made history': when presenting past events, it can be very interesting to add a personal touch by asking some of the main actors involved in the event to tell their own experience. Similarly, when the objective is to inspire your learners, pursuing personal stories told by those who lived them is a great tool!	This format allows for an effective and engaging presentation of descriptive topics that are based on statistical data and factual knowledge. Suitable for different audiences, as long as the style and design corresponds to their needs.	Visuals are an impactful way of depicting practical examples, case studies and inspirational storytelling. They can be used with other formats.	These can be used to provide an overview giving the main information about a topic, combined with stats, graphs and visuals.	They are a valuable addition to other formats that provide an introduction or general information about a specific topic. Webinars can provide advanced and critical knowledge from experts and enhance the interactivity of the course.
When Not to Use	When the course addresses an audience which is less receptive to a classroom-like experience (for instance, students who are looking to exchange, rather than passively listen to a 'professor'). When the learning objective is less focused on obtaining information and more focused on being proactive and developing soft skills (see below activities better suited to this).	When the audience/subject is very formal, animated videos can come across as not 'serious' enough. When there are other learning activities best presented in the form of animations, it is advisable to prioritise which course activities are best presented in this way. Animated videos can be expensive and time-consuming, so it is sensible to reserve them for those chunks of content which benefit most from animated storytelling.	When the learners still need a foundation/background information: without the appropriate foundation, learners can be confused by the analysis and may not understand why the speaker is taking a certain position. In such cases, either support the interview with narrated passages which provide the necessary knowledge, or precede the interview video with another explanatory activity (e-lecture, animated video, presentation, etc.).	They are an effective way of providing an overview of topics with a lot of data. However, they are not suitable for presenting critical arguments or personal story-telling.	They should not be used if they do not convey the course messages or do not cater for its audience.	These are not effective for conveying inspirational or personal storytelling as an important part of presenting a topic. Furthermore, younger audiences might not find them as engaging as narrated formats (i.e. videos).	They should not be used for factual topics (i.e. historic overviews) as these can be presented in a more engaging way if combined with visuals (i.e. animated videos).

ONLINE LEARNING - LEARNING FORMATS

ACTIVITY FORMAT	GAMES	READERS	QUIZZES	ESSAYS/WRITTEN ASSIGNMENTS	FORUM ASSIGNMENTS	PRACTICAL ASSIGNMENTS
Description	These include interactive formats in which learners follow a set of simple rules in order to find out new information or test their knowledge of the topic.	Reading materials about a specific topic.	A way of testing knowledge acquisition by the learners. Presented as a set of questions that learners have to answer.	Assignments in which learners are requested to write their opinions, arguments or critical views on a specific topic relevant to a part of the course.	Assignments in which learners are required to post entries in the forum.	Assignments in which learners need to conduct additional research on the topic or to contribute with new/ additional information relevant to a part of the course.
When to Use	They are a fun way to start learning about something new or to test new knowledge following other formats.	They can be used for advanced topics that cannot be presented in shorter formats (i.e. animated video). Also, they can serve as a theoretical introduction/ background to a case study or practical example (presented in another format – video or infographic).	Quizzes should follow the most relevant topics or thematic parts in the course, to provide learners with an opportunity to assess and improve their knowledge.	These should follow other thematic formats (videos, readers, etc.) that provide new insights or a critical perspective about a topic. Essays are a good way to encourage critical thinking and to enhance argumentation skills among learners.	These should be used to stimulate discussions and debates among the learners about the most interesting topics or questions raised by the course. This is a very good way to boost interactivity within the course.	This is a good way of encouraging individual work and independent contributions by the learners. These can be formulated as research tasks, project proposals, interview assignments, etc.
When Not to Use	Not to be used for advanced topics as they might have a confusing effect on the learning process. They should be relatively easy and fun, as the aim is to make learning more interesting. Furthermore, they must correspond to the technical capacities of the learning platform.	They should be avoided as a frequently used learning format when it comes to younger audiences, as it lacks interactivity and engagement.	They should not be used without providing direct feedback on answers given by learners. Feedback is essential here as it enables learners to make corrections and improve their knowledge.	They should not be used if they do not contribute to the learning process. Learners should find them useful for consolidating their knowledge and critical thinking.	Should not be used for 'dry' or factual topics, but for more intriguing ones in which learners can argue and contribute with their own ideas and opinions.	They should not be used for advanced or expert topics for which the learners do not have an adequate level of knowledge or necessary resources.

Whichever format you choose, here are some tips to remember:

- ▶ Too much of the same activity can become boring – try to mix and match;
- ▶ Try not to develop videos which take more than 5 minutes to watch, in order to keep the audience engaged;
- ▶ Allow your learners to go deeper into a subject by adding extra links to discussions and information.

TIP BOX: USER PERSPECTIVE

Do not forget to take into consideration the needs and expectations of your target group. At this point, cater for them strategically by using the methods that would optimally stimulate their learning process. For example, if you are making an online course for a younger audience – storytelling through animated videos, visually appealing readers and short video interviews would probably work well, as this audience tends to like content presented in a brief and entertaining way.

On the other hand, if you are preparing a more specialised or advanced course, the audience might prefer the content to be presented in a more conventional format. In this case, videos with experts, longer articles and live webinars would be more appropriate.

CASE STUDY: METHODOLOGY OF IMPACT EUROPE

Based on the analysis of the needs our target group (people aged 16-25), we kept two main elements in mind when we chose our content formats – **engagement** and **interactivity**. This meant that the course content had to be presented in a way that stimulates active learning and enables interactions within the course. Thus, we presented the content mainly through interviews and animated videos and added an interactive forum to facilitate debates and exchanges between learners.

Curriculum

Once you have formulated the learning goals, style and methods, you are ready to structure the course curriculum, which has two purposes:

1 For the user, it serves as a learning plan and navigation through the themes of your course. Therefore, try to structure it as clearly as possible, with distinct titles for each step, indicating the topic and type of activity. Feel free to break the course into segments, in which you group content thematically with relevant activities. Once again, try to think of the most comprehensive way for a user to go through the course.

CASE STUDY: USER EXPERIENCE AND MOTIVATION

The way in which you structure the online course influences how the users navigate through it and shapes their entire learning experience. Thus, we decided to present the content of Impact Europe in several parts: *Warm-up*, *European Union*, *The Greens*, *Hot Topics* and *Activism*. Each part was presented as one stage of a game. Users received a reward – a badge, after completing each stage. The so-called ‘gamification’ method turned out to be a great way to boost user motivation.

2 In your case, the curriculum serves as a plan of content production in the next stage. For each step in the course, identify the format for presenting it, related activities for the users, and duration. Also, add the specific collaborators, additional resources and deadlines. In this way, you can create the content production plan. Important advice here is to allow yourself to be flexible, as things might change along the way.

Here is a curriculum sample from two learning stages in the Impact Europe course:



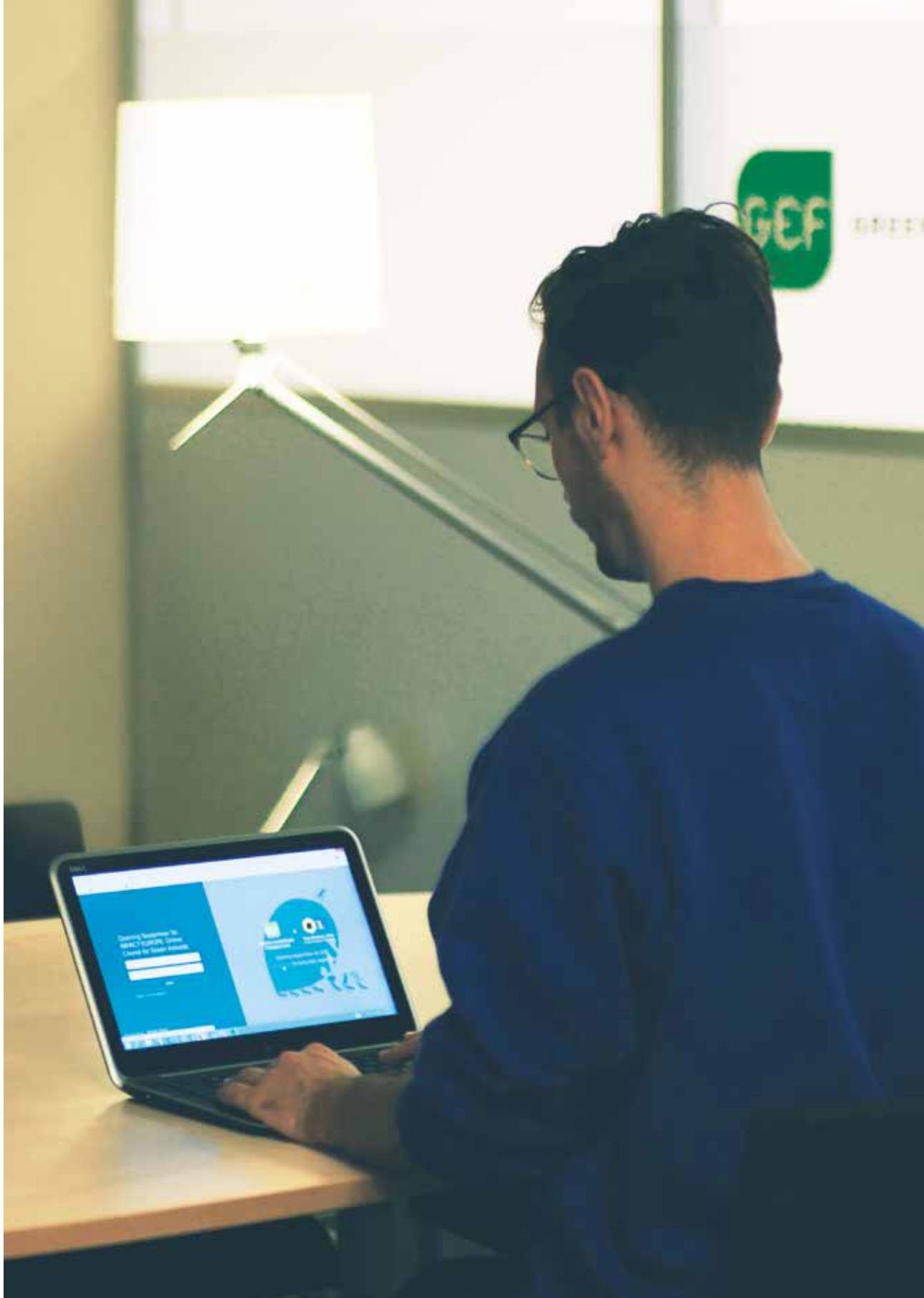
COURSE OBJECTIVE: Providing accessible and interactive education on the EU (history, institutions, values, current challenges).

STAGE 2
European Union

LEARNING GOAL	ACTIVITY	FORMAT
▶ Participants get introduced to the topic of this stage, with a presentation of some interesting facts about the European Union (EU).	▶ Watch a video which serves as a fun teaser of learners initial knowledge about the EU. It consists of five questions on funny and interesting facts about the EU, followed by correct answers.	▶ Animated video <i>True or false</i>
▶ Participants get to understand the big idea behind the EU and gain insights into its historical development.	▶ Watch an engaging video, explaining why we needed the EU in the first place, and how its form and aims developed from the Coal and Steel Community to the Treaty of Lisbon.	▶ Video <i>A brief history of the EU</i>
▶ Participants learn the main facts about the EU as it is today.	▶ Get to know the main facts about the EU, its members, budget and other important aspects through a detailed infographic.	▶ Infographic <i>EU today</i>
▶ Participants test their knowledge about the historical development of the EU.	▶ Take a quiz about the content provided in the previous video on the history of the EU.	▶ Quiz
▶ Participants learn more about the role of the main EU institutions : the European Parliament, the European Commission and the European Council.	▶ Watch a video describing the role of main EU institutions.	▶ Animated video <i>Who does what in the EU</i>
▶ Participants learn about the legislative process in the main EU institutions.	▶ Watch a video illustrating the legislative process amongst the main EU institutions.	▶ Animated video <i>How European law is made</i>
▶ Participants test their knowledge about the main institutions in the EU and their legislative process.	▶ Take part in a quiz about the content provided in the previous videos about the institutions of the EU and their legislative process.	▶ Quiz
▶ Participants gain critical insights into the institutional struggles within the EU from an expert perspective.	▶ Learn from an interview with MEP Bas Eickhout (Greens/EFA) about critical views on the current institutional struggles within the EU and the Greens' approach to these.	▶ Video interview <i>European Union: A critical view</i>
▶ Participants find out more about the reforming potentials of the EU from the perspective of a political expert and and get inspiration from seeing the EU through a critical eye.	▶ See an interview with MEP Bas Eickhout (Greens/EFA) with critical insights into the reforming potential within the EU and the role of politicians, social movements and activists for the future of the European project.	▶ Video interview <i>Who can save Europe</i>
▶ Participants form their own arguments about the relevance of the EU and how it can be improved for the better future of Europe.	▶ Participants formulate their own view of the EU and share their reflections on what a better EU would look like. This way, they contribute to a collaborative <i>Charter for the future of the EU</i> .	▶ Forum assignment: <i>Your European Union</i>

COURSE OBJECTIVE: Providing accessible and interactive education about the role of Greens at the European level.

STAGE 5 Greens in Europe	LEARNING GOAL	ACTIVITY	FORMAT
	▶ Participants learn about the historical development of the Greens in Europe and the most relevant milestones of the movement.	▶ Watch a video that illustrates the history of the Green movement while highlighting its milestones through interviews and archival footage.	▶ Video <i>A brief history of the Greens</i>
	▶ Participants learn about the European Green family and the roles of its members: the Green European Foundation, the Green Group in the European Parliament, the European Green Party and the Federation of Young European Greens.	▶ See an animated video explaining the role of Green actors on the European level.	▶ Animated video <i>Who does what</i>
	▶ Participants test their knowledge about the Green movement and the key Green actors in Europe.	▶ Take part in a quiz about the content provided in the previous videos about the history of the Greens and their main representatives on European level.	▶ Quiz
	▶ Learners actively discover Green actors in their own country by conducting desk research.	▶ Participants identify the main Green actors in their country - the national Green party, foundation, young Greens and other organisations. A short list of Green actors is posted in the Forum.	▶ Forum assignment <i>Greens in your country</i>



Technical and design requirements

In addition to outlining the curriculum of your online course, its functionality and visual features need to be added to the framework. These requirements will guide the next steps in the development process: the choice of platform to host your course and the entire content production.

- ▶ **Functionality:** The online course must be hosted with a set of technical features that enable the learning approach and methodology for your course. Most importantly, the digital platform that hosts your course needs to be able to accommodate the formats and activities included in the curriculum. Bear in mind the needs of your target group and their preferences when it comes to using the internet.
- ▶ **Visual design:** The visual appearance of the course needs primarily to enhance the user's comprehension and readability of the course and its activities. Furthermore, it can be used as a tool to give extra stimulation to the learning process via materials presented in an engaging and up-to-date graphic design.

TIP BOX: CREATE A STYLE GUIDE FOR YOUR COURSE

To make your course more visually coherent, we recommend creating a style guide in which you set out the colours, fonts and other visual elements that are applied to all the materials throughout the course. This will have a significant impact on the overall appeal of the course and will strengthen its visual identity.

TIP BOX: ACCESSIBILITY PRINCIPLE

The most important principle to consider regarding technical and design requirements is accessibility. Here are a few questions to ask when developing a user-friendly course:

- ▶ Have you chosen an accessible medium?
- ▶ Can the course be accessed using a screen reader for learners who have a visual impairment?
- ▶ If there is animated content, is it easy to read and understand?
- ▶ Do videos include subtitles/transcripts from the speakers?
- ▶ And ultimately, are there any elements that distract from the learning experience – if so, how can these be mitigated?

Online platform

The next step at this stage is to decide where to host your online course. You will need a digital platform that can accommodate the standards you have established in the previous steps, such as the learning style, methodology, technical and design requirements. In other words, the platform must enable the presentation of the course curriculum according to your criteria. Finding an ideal host is not always easy, so it is important to be aware of host limitations in terms of capacities for customisation and technical possibilities.

To help your selection process, we recommend conducting an analysis of the multiple e-learning platforms available by assessing their performance in relation to a set of criteria, such as:

- ▶ **Functional features for users:** The possibility to download the content, the content formats supported by the platform (video, quizzes, assignments upload, slides, etc.), interactivity, usability on a variety of screens (tablets, mobile, etc.);
- ▶ **Functional features for admin:** User-friendly back-end, hosting and upload of learning formats (video, images, audio, readers, etc.), access to data about learners and learning progress, etc.;
- ▶ **Customisation and upgrade:** Possibility to change functional options and adjust them to the needs of your course;
- ▶ **Design elements:** Possibility to customise colours, fonts and other visual elements.

CASE STUDY – IMPACT EUROPE SELECTION RESULTS

After a careful analysis, we decided to host our online course on a platform provided by INTUO.IO, as it proved to be the optimal choice in terms of design and usability for our needs. The criteria we took into consideration included:

- ☒ What skills are required by the GEF team for managing the course?
- ☒ Can the project team manage the platform without requiring specialised training?
- ☒ Is the platform flexible in terms of its functionality and design?
- ☒ Does the platform offer an intuitive user interface for both developers and learners?
- ☒ Can it host a variety of assignments, including video, e-lessons, quizzes?
- ☒ Is it accessible on various devices (computer, phone, tablet)?
- ☒ It is possible to assess data about the interaction of participants with the content?
- ☒ Is it possible to integrate GEF's visual identity into the platform?
- ☒ Is the navigation through the course flexible for learners – course outline, table of contents, glossary, FAQ, ability to jump anywhere in the course?
- ☒ What are the costs and human resources necessary for its set-up and maintenance?

TIP BOX: TEST THE PLATFORM

It is recommended that you really get to know the platform you are using – play and experiment with its functionality before you complete your course design. For example, if the platform uses preset terminology to structure the course (for instance, you could be talking of stages, chapters, levels, etc.) you should adhere to this terminology rather than using alternative language as learners may be confused by multiple structures and find it more difficult to navigate through the course.

EXPERT TIPS: GILLES MATTELIN, INTUO, CO-FOUNDER & COO

How can the hosting platform contribute to the success of an online course?

“The learning platform must accommodate the users’ needs. INTUO’s learning platform uses an attractive user-friendly interface which motivates individuals to start learning. They can do this whenever they want, wherever they want, at their own pace.

Furthermore, the learning platform should provide access to data behind the course. The INTUO platform allows for very detailed analytics and insights into the students’ results. Instructors can see precisely how long they have spent on the learning material, on each slide and even when and where the student paused or rewound a video. Thus, engagement in the course can be closely monitored and feedback can be given in a timely manner.”

What features of the hosting platform are important from the users’ perspective?

“It is all about motivation! As a student, you are not always eager to start learning. However, the INTUO platform implements gamification elements that help to motivate students. Badges are awarded after they have completed a stage, and when they have successfully followed the course they are awarded official certificates. These certificates look impressive on a CV.

In addition, providing a variety of content has significant effects. The INTUO platform offers the users a unique way to learn. The content provided can be anything from videos and slides to extensive quizzes and pictures. Via this interactive method, students’ engagement levels are reportedly much higher than for offline learning.

It is also about other features that facilitate the learning experience. Through INTUO, every student has access to the courses’ library. INTUO has implemented a smart filter through which the students can look for specific courses based on language, topic or date. Most importantly, a student has a detailed overview on his/her own progress and growth. Users can see which skills they have acquired over time, identify where there is still room for improvement and can subscribe to specific courses accordingly.”

Course availability

Once you establish the course framework, you must decide when and how it will be made available to the users. There are several important questions to consider:

- ▶ **Duration:** When and for how long will the course be open?
- ▶ **Access:** Who will be able to participate? Will it only be available to the main target group (via a selection process) or to the general public, too?
- ▶ **Fees:** Will the course be free?
- ▶ **Testing:** Do you want to test the course before its official launch? Would you test a part or all of it?

CASE STUDY: IMPACT EUROPE'S AVAILABILITY

The complete version of our online course was available to the general public for four months. To establish a wide reach, we kept it open as a free course for anyone interested in learning about the European Union, the Green movement and ways to become more politically active. However, we implemented a testing phase before the official launch of the course in which we sampled a part of it and received feedback from potential users. This process proved to be highly beneficial as we managed to improve the course and incorporate users' inputs into the content production.

TIP BOX: COURSE FACILITATION

An important consideration when deciding on the duration of your course is facilitation. You could make your course available for a longer period of time, but if you plan to actively participate in discussions, mark assignments or monitor/moderate content, then this could mean a significant time commitment with higher operating costs.

Conversely, some learners are happier to have access with lower facilitation than to have no access at all. A balanced approach can be achieved by actively facilitating your course for a limited period of time, then reducing that facilitation the longer the course is open.

Our advice: find the right balance, keeping in mind your learners and your organisation's resources. Use the final course survey to ask participants whether they would have liked more or less moderation during the learning experience.

Payment options

At GEF, we have decided to offer our courses for free, at least during the first year, to attract as many learners as possible. However, when designing your course, you might consider requesting a participation fee. Different platforms offer different fee structures for course participants. Many have a free option but may also operate the following business models, either separately or in conjunction, as part of a 'premium' offer:

- ▶ **Pay for certification:** All course elements are free, but learners pay if they want to evidence their achievement/completion;
- ▶ **Pay for assessment:** Course elements are free, with the exception of a test/assignment task, which may be marked by the partner or an examining body;
- ▶ **Pay for access:** Learners pay to access the course materials, either at the point of entry, or to continue accessing the course after a limited time.

Some platforms also offer learners a 'subscription' model, whereby they can take multiple courses with full access, assessment and certification for a monthly fee.



Stage 3: Content production

Once the framework of your course is complete, you can start creating the actual content. Below, we will share our team's experience in developing the entire curriculum for Impact Europe, which involved producing a variety of formats and activities in order to offer a stimulating learning environment.



CASE STUDY: IMPACT EUROPE'S CONTENT PRODUCTION

Content development can be organised in various ways, according to the budget and capacities within an organisation or team. For instance, the GEF team worked with an external team of online learning specialists, professional video-makers, animators, voiceover companies and designers to deliver a 10-hour course. Collaboration with such specialists makes the production process more efficient and enhances the overall quality of the learning material, although it also requires a substantial volume of resources. Therefore, it is important to be aware of the costs of different providers while planning your project's budget.

Here are some tips to keep in mind during content development:

- ▶ **Course objectives and learning goals:** Make sure that the topics, themes and issues you are working on are consistent with the course objectives throughout this stage. Your objectives will serve as a reference point and can provide a focus for decision-making.
- ▶ **Target group:** Always keep the user perspective in mind and the specific needs of the audience you want to reach. Try to envision how they might experience each activity you are creating and how they would benefit in terms of acquiring new knowledge or skills.
- ▶ **Curriculum:** Use this as a plan for production of the activities on your course. Set deadlines and assess progress for each step along the way.
- ▶ **Limitations:** Consider what you aspire to achieve regarding the functionality and quality of your online course, while also bearing in mind the limitations in terms of resources, capacities and technical possibilities.

Once you have outlined your curriculum, you can start implementing the course activities. For each activity, we recommend you start with a script; once this is complete, present it in an appealing format (reader, video, infographic, forum, etc.) that would be most suitable for your learners.

Script writing

Writing a script is the first step in developing most of the activities for online learning. Depending on the activity, scriptwriting can entail a variety of creative and academic work, such as writing, researching, editing, summarising, interviewing, proofreading, etc. Here are three common forms of scripts:

- ▶ **Instructions:** Clear guidelines on how to complete a step in the course (i.e. forum debate on a specific topic or an essay assignment);
- ▶ **Interviews:** A set of questions prepared in advance for the interview participant(s) to guide the flow of information to be presented;
- ▶ **Narratives:** Complex description of a topic or an issue which may require a significant amount of research and acquiring a thorough knowledge of the subject (i.e. texts for videos and readers).

To start, we will focus on the narrative form as the basis for producing videos and readers. Here is a list of guidelines to consider before and during scriptwriting:

- ▶ **Set a purpose:** Start by setting out the objectives you want to accomplish with each script. Make sure they reflect the course objectives and learning goals. The script goals can include providing new knowledge about a specific topic or issue, creating a call for action, training for a skill, or simply informing participants.
- ▶ **Remember your audience:** Keep the user perspective in mind when writing any script. Think of the language, style and tone of communicating information that is the most appropriate for your target group. For example, in case of a younger audience, your style of writing should be engaging and more informal, whilst for an expert audience, use a more serious, yet conversational tone. The tone of voice in an online course can be effectively used to establish the voice of the course 'educator' or 'presenter'. When teaching a large online group, creating an illusion of the teacher's presence gives the learner a sense of a personal connection with them, helping them to feel less 'isolated' in their learning experience.
- ▶ **Think about duration:** Depending on the format, consider how long the script should be. For example, extensive scripts are more suitable as readers, while shorter ones are more easily transformed into videos. In our experience, videos should ideally be three minutes long, with a maximum of five minutes. If your story cannot be told in five minutes, we strongly recommend splitting it into two videos.

- ▶ **Research:** Make sure you acquire a proper level of knowledge and critical insights into the topic of the script. To get all the facts straight, consult the experts in the subject who can provide you with advice and additional resources.
- ▶ **Read it out loud:** To make sure the information you want to provide with your script is well structured and comprehensive, we recommend reading each script out loud to another team member. This exercise leads to additional editing and elimination of previously unnoticed mistakes. The process improves not only the quality of writing, but also the auditory perception of the content you are trying to convey. This is especially useful if the script is used as a narrative for a video. In the case of video production, always try to remember that you are writing for the learner's ear.
- ▶ **Proof-read everything:** Once the script is finalised, make sure it is proof-read by another person to avoid any mistakes.

Video production

Videos probably represent the most impactful learning format for online courses. They have the capacity to transmit both theoretical knowledge and practical skills in an engaging manner. If you want to stimulate the learning process, videos are a great way to capture learners' attention. They enable active learning based on visual and auditory cognition. Put simply, it is often much more fun to learn by watching and listening compared to just reading. When deciding if the video is the right format, take into account both the subject matter you want to teach and the target group you want to reach. For more extensive topics, it is also effective to offer additional reading material after the video presentation.

Different video formats can be used for online learning. Here, we provide advice on making animated videos and video interviews as the main formats we produced for Impact Europe. But first, here are a few tips on how to accomplish an effective and coherent 'look and feel' in your videos to bear in mind before the actual production process starts:

TIP BOX: ENSURE QUALITY

A word of caution - while videos can often be a very engaging experience, they can also have the opposite effect if executed poorly or unnecessarily, and can be difficult to rectify once produced. The first question you should always ask your team before producing a video is why learners would benefit from the content being presented as a video, rather than a text article, audio file, or another cheaper method.

Video look & feel

If your online course uses video as the major learning format, we recommend paying attention to the videos' look and feel elements so as to create a coherent and impactful visual identity. Here are several aspects to consider before you go into production:

- ▶ **Style guide:** Make sure you incorporate the colours, fonts, illustrations or any other visual elements in the visuals and animations produced for the videos.
- ▶ **Create an intro and outro slide:** This is an easy way to connect all the videos featured in your course. Use the intro slide to indicate the name of the course and to include other visual elements (images, illustration, logos). Combine it with a short musical jingle to make it more distinctive. Use the outro to include any other relevant information – such as partners' logos, funding source, relevant websites or content references.
- ▶ **Background music:** This is an important feature in video editing, as it contributes significantly to the flow and tempo of storytelling. Make sure you select the background music carefully, with the following criteria in mind:
 - ▶ *Audience:* as always, keep the user perspective in mind and how the music can contribute to their auditory experience of the video;
 - ▶ *Rhythm:* find tunes that match the pace in which you want the information to be presented in the video; avoid melodies that do not match the tempo of the narrative or speakers in the video;
 - ▶ *Intensity:* make sure that the tune does not disturb the narrative, but enhances the overall dynamics of the video.

- ▶ **Voiceover:** To transform a script into an impactful voiceover recording, select actors whose voices are suitable for the purpose of your videos. The tone of their voice can impact the perception of the material among the target group, so do not forget to take into account the user perspective when selecting actors. Voiceover companies usually provide actors with different voices, so try to select those that best fit your course needs. Another option is for the course educator to record voiceovers, provided he or she is comfortable with doing this. Learners may identify positively with a consistent, familiar voice throughout the course.

Animated videos

Animations are a great way to present the thematic content of your online course in a short and entertaining format. They work successfully as a learning material for different audiences, providing the visuals and tone of the narration are customised to their needs.

Here is the process we followed when developing an animated video:

- 1 Develop script:** Most activities for an online course start with a script, which contains the detailed information on what the learners will hear. Think of including the animator in the process of writing the script. This can contribute to a more successful outcome, as the animator will understand better what the video is about, as well as be able to provide creative input which could determine the final format of your script. As soon as the text is written, make sure it is proofread by a native speaker.
- 2 Read out loud:** We recommend reading every script out-loud with your team before recording the voiceover. You will immediately realise what is boring, unclear, or simply too complicated.
- 3 Record voiceover:** The video can be narrated by someone in your team, or by a professional voice actor. Depending on the budget available, and unless someone in your team is experienced in narrating videos, we recommend going for the voice actor option, as it will add a professional touch to the final video. Don't forget about the gender perspective: including female voice actors is a very important aspect and often ignored!

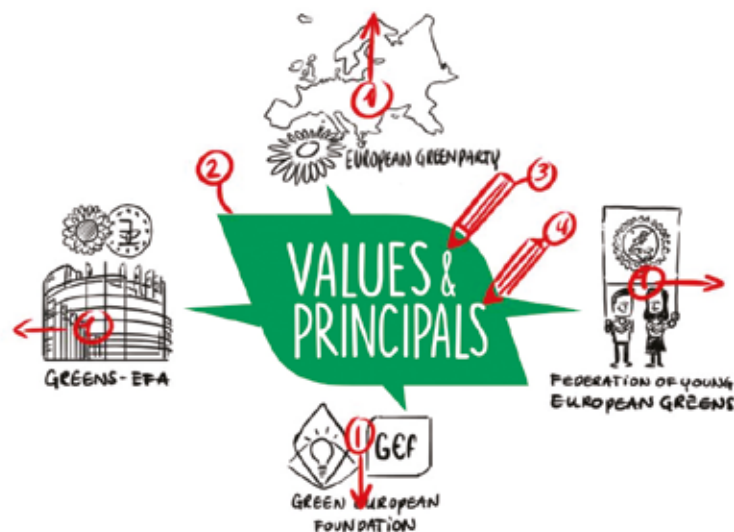
TIP BOX: SPEAKING RATE

Be aware that the length of the script corresponds to the duration of the voiceover and therefore will affect the length of the video. Taking into account that the average speaking rate is about 150 words a minute, you can simultaneously plan the final length of your script and the duration of voiceover. For example, if you want a 3-minute video, your script should not exceed 450 words.

CASE STUDY: IMPACT EUROPE'S DIVERSE NARRATORS

As our course included a variety of animated videos, we decided to make it more dynamic by working with more than one narrator. We wanted a gender balance, so we included both female and male voices with a tonality appropriate for the subject matter and our target group. This also made the process of watching all the videos more stimulating for the learners.

4 Draw the storyboard: Based on the script and voiceover recording, the animator can create an initial sketch of the animation, called the storyboard. It usually comprises draft images for each screen that will follow the narration in the final video. A great advantage of this is that you are briefed about the general directions the animation will take, and you have the possibility to provide feedback and your own inputs in advance.



5 Animation: Based on the storyboard, the animator creates the animation with a voiceover narration.

EXPERT ADVICE: PAUL STELLINGWERF & MICHIEL VAN HAREN,
THATEXPLAINS.COM ANIMATIONS AND EDITING

Why are animated videos relevant material for online learning?

“These days, videos and animation are all around us, and growing ever-more popular. Over 4 billion videos are watched on YouTube every day and we are no longer limited to watching video content on a TV or computer. With smartphones and tablets, we can have video content available to us anywhere we go, at any time.

And animated videos are not just great for entertainment, but are also a tool for online learning. With a well-thought-out animation, it is easier to explain complex subjects than with just text and still images. Well-designed animations capture the audience’s attention and hold it, and it has been shown that people retain information more easily if presented (audio-)visually. So, animation is memorable, seizing the attention and enhancing the participation of your audience.

You can use animation as an introduction to a specific subject, or to reinforce key points of information explained in text. You can add interaction to an animation, asking questions and giving your audience time to think about what they have just seen and heard.”

How can you create impactful animations for online learning?

“A good animation starts with a good script. Try to keep it short and to the point: 1 to 3 minutes is a good ballpark figure; although, of course, it depends on the subject. Animation should put across key points, and generally should not go into too much detail. Animation is time-intensive to produce, which is another reason for keeping your script to the point. Remember: a picture is worth a thousand words.

An animation will often be combined with a voiceover, although it is also possible to work with (animated) titles to reinforce key points, as well as adding subtitles to make the animation more accessible. Use of music and sound effects can further enhance an animation, but can also distract if overused. If you are using voiceover, always make sure it is clear and easy to follow, and does not get drowned out by music.

It is advisable to already work with the team producing the animation in the scripting phase. In this way, visualisation ideas can be generated early and the script can be optimised to work with the animation.”



TIP BOX: ANIMATION AND YOUR STYLE GUIDE

If you develop a style guide with colours, fonts and other visual elements for your online course, make sure you communicate these with the animator and apply them in the animations. This creates visual coherence between the videos and contributes to a distinctive visual identity of the course.

CASE STUDY: COMBINING ANIMATION WITH FILMED MATERIAL (HISTORY OF EUROPEAN UNION AND THE GREENS)

The great thing about animations is that they can be combined with filmed or archive material to deliver compelling stories. For example, the storyboard for our videos about the historical development of the European Union and the Green movement were based on a timeline which combined an animated overview and filmed interviews with the relevant actors and archival footage from specific events.

6 Final edits: Once the initial version of the animation has been completed by the animator, give your feedback and suggestions for improvements so that the final edits can be done. At this point, it is good to check if the background music fits the tempo of the animation.

7 Subtitles: Once the animation has been finalised, the subtitles can be added. If the voiceover for your video is in English, we recommend adding subtitles in the same language, as this can be very useful for learners lacking full proficiency in English.

Interview-based videos

Filmed interviews are a useful way to present advanced topics, specific issues or practical case studies with experts who can share their opinions and experience regarding the subjects you want to teach the learners about. Furthermore, in our experience, interviews can be framed in several formats, with distinctive effects:

- ▶ **Critical analysis:** An effective way for conveying certain topics based on the expertise of the interviewee(s), combined with general facts;
- ▶ **Opinion piece:** A way of portraying an issue from the perspective of a specific expert;
- ▶ **Storytelling:** Where the opinions of several interviewees are used to build a story around a topic;
- ▶ **Debate:** When different opinions are combined to depict a variety of perspectives on the same issue.

The process of producing any interview-based video comprises the following phases:

- 1 Preparation:** Once you know the aim, topic and format of the interview, invite the potential speakers to participate and brief them about the purpose of the video and your online course in general. Try to convince them of the importance of their participation as a valuable contribution to your course. You will also need to organise the filming day with them, which means you will need to set up:
 - ▶ **Date:** Schedule the filming date with participants and your filming team. We suggest scheduling as many speakers as possible on the same day as this will lower your costs and increase the efficiency of the filming;
 - ▶ **Place:** Arrange a space in which the interview will be filmed in advance, in case you need to get permission or coordinate with the location providers;
 - ▶ **Script:** While contacting speakers and organising the filming setting, note down any questions that will guide the information flow provided in the video.

TIP BOX: HOW TO WRITE GOOD INTERVIEW QUESTIONS

Formulate the interview questions strategically in order to achieve the best outcome for the video. Try to anticipate what questions would prove most impactful in terms of the answers you want to include in the video. Note them down and use them as a reminder during the interview. Furthermore, be ready to be flexible, as changes and other interesting questions might arise during filming.

CASE STUDY: IMPACT EUROPE'S INTERVIEWS ON THE EUROPEAN UNION

We included an expert interview with a Member of the European Parliament during which we gathered more relevant material than expected. To make the most out of this, we decided to split the interview material into two videos:

1. Critical analysis of the current role of the EU institutions from a Green perspective;
2. Opinion piece on the reforming potentials of the EU from the speaker's view-point.

2 Filming: Try to make each filming session as efficient as possible by collaborating with the filming team. They can help you get the most out of the location and speakers for the content of each video. It is crucial to do your best to get from the speakers all the information necessary for the video. Feel free to ask them to repeat parts in which they might be confused or make mistakes. The editing process can help later on, but receiving a clear presentation is a great start.

3 Transcribing: The next step is to transcribe the filmed material into the video transcript. This involves watching the raw filmed recordings and selecting the segments that should be included in the video. During this process, it is very useful to note down both the text of the speech and the exact timings of the selected segments. In this way, you will create an overview which will serve as an editing guide. You may be able to outsource this activity to third-party organisations as this can be a time-intensive task.

4 Editing: Send the editing guide to the film editor and brief him/her on what you want to achieve with the format and style of the video. Once you receive the initial version of the video, provide feedback and inputs for improvements or suggestions for segments to be changed or removed. In this process, it is important to be ready for adjustments and compromises in order to make sure that the material you have fits accordingly. Another important part in the editing process is to pay attention that the selected background music is a good fit for the video.

TIP BOX: NAME TAGS

Editors should add name tags to indicate the name of each speaker and their role. The template of the name tags should also reflect the colours and fonts of your style guide.

Designing e-readers

PDF readers are a good solution for presenting extensive topics or as additional material relevant to other activities in the course. Furthermore, they are a budget-friendly format that can serve as a substitute for videos. In our experience with developing Impact Europe, we encountered several types of e-readers based on their relevance as a learning material:

- ▶ **Main presentation:** This can serve as a thematic overview of a certain topic or issue;
- ▶ **Additional material:** This can be an accompanying learning resource for other course activities (i.e. as a case study following a short video, which gave a general introduction of the topic);
- ▶ **Optional reading:** More extensive publications relevant to the content of the online course, offered to those interested in finding out more;
- ▶ **Infographic:** A special form of reader that summarises statistical and general facts about a specific topic through a combination of short descriptions, graphs and visual illustrations. As with videos/animations, before including an infographic make sure you are in agreement on what you would like the infographic to achieve. Consider whether the information you would like to present can be shared in a simpler, more accessible format.





EXPERT ADVICE: NUNO PINTO DA CRUZ, VISUAL DESIGN

Why are infographics useful material for online learning?

"Infographics are powerful tools that can convey complex information by using graphics to enhance the ability of the human visual system to see patterns and trends. Fifty percent of the human brain is dedicated to visual functions, and images are processed faster than text.

As an image is worth a thousand words, graphic designers use infographics to quickly communicate a message and to simplify the presentation of large amounts of data, often by using visual metaphors and an iconic language.

In the context of online learning, infographics may help the user to understand and identify information in an efficient and gratifying manner. They may also provide an entertaining and lively tone in the learning process."

How are impactful infographics designed?

"Patterns, trends and correlations that might go undetected in text-based data can be exposed and recognised more easily with data visualisation. Graphics reveal data. The designer's main task is to find the adequate visual system to display it.

Also, in order to work, an infographic should be visually engaging and captivating – the displaying of the information must be pleasant to the user's eye. Like a comic book author, the graphic designer creates a coherent and intelligible visual language that must take into account a subtle balance between text and image. Typography, colour, patterns and illustrations are just some of the instruments the designer can use for infographics."

When creating e-readers, we recommend taking the following elements into consideration:

- ▶ **Structure and flow:** Structure the information in a logical and comprehensive way. Divide the presentation by using multiple subdivisions with titles, paragraphs and bullet points. Try to put yourself in the mind of the learner encountering the topic for the first time. Make sure the e-reader has a good flow in terms of presenting facts, arguments and critical overviews.
- ▶ **Visuals:** Accompany the text with appropriate or powerful visuals. Try to make experiencing the e-reader more engaging and stimulating by combining the text with visuals that enhance the story.
- ▶ **Visibility and readability:** Ensure the optimal and easy use of the e-reader from the user's perspective in terms of the size and colours of fonts. Make sure that the reader is viewable on various devices.
- ▶ **Visual identity:** Apply your style guide and establish visual coherence among e-readers and other learning formats.

Forum and user interactivity

To enable user interactivity within your online course, set up a forum function on the digital platform hosting the course. A forum can also be provided through external sources, but we recommend having an integrated forum option as this enables the learning process to take place within a single learning environment. In our experience, this is highly desirable from the user's point of view.

Different platforms will present 'forums' in different ways. INTUO uses a traditional style, whereby the area for discussion is separated from the core course content, while other platforms (FutureLearn, iVersity) have a more 'social' learning ethos and include the option to comment directly within course content/steps rather than in separate forums.

Besides facilitating interactivity in online learning, the forum has multiple functionalities. You can use it as:

- ▶ **Space for assignments:** As a place to submit essays and research-based tasks, with the possibility of providing direct feedback;
- ▶ **Space for discussions:** A great way to organise and facilitate debate among participants about specific issues and to foster critical thinking and exchange of ideas;

- ▶ **Space for community building:** Use the forum as a place where participants can get to know each other. Set up collaborative assignments in which they can learn together in an online environment.

Here are some technical aspects to keep in mind when setting up a forum:

- ▶ **User interactivity:** Enable the personification of learners by including their name and (optional) profile picture. Set up comment and feedback options to allow discussions and conversations within the forum;
- ▶ **Attachment upload:** Allow users to submit their assignments when required;
- ▶ **Back-end and admin flexibility:** Make sure you have control over the forum structure and entries, and the possibility to remove spam posts is also very useful.

CASE STUDY: IMPACT EUROPE'S INTEGRATED FORUM

As a direct result of our learners' feedback, we upgraded our online course with an integrated forum feature. In collaboration with the INTUO team, we incorporated all the technical aspects listed above in order to provide the optimal experience both for the users and our team as admins.

Checking learners' knowledge

Another important aspect of online learning concerns the activities that allow learners either to test their knowledge, form new opinions and arguments, or to use new skills, based on the content provided by your course. Here are our suggestions on how to assess the learning process:

- ▶ **Quizzes:** A basic way to test learners' understanding of the topics and the most important lessons presented throughout the course. Set up a quiz after each major thematic activity in your course. Make it dynamic by including different types of questions, such as multiple choice, open answer, true or false, etc. When formulating questions, try to stimulate thinking without being too complicated. The quiz should reflect the key lessons provided in the learning material.

CASE STUDY: IMPACT EUROPE'S QUIZ TIPS

Quizzes do not only test the knowledge but can also facilitate retention of the most relevant information among the learners. Therefore, it is important to allow them to retake the same quiz in order to find the correct answers and achieve positive results in the end. Based on the feedback from our learners, we learned that direct feedback is essential for quizzes. We provided direct comments after each answer, with positive reinforcement for correct answers and the possibility to access the correct one in the case of incorrect answers. Also, the users have different preferences in terms of how long a quiz should be. So try to strike the right balance between the number of questions and the key lessons to be learned from a given activity.

- ▶ **Short essays:** Encourage critical thinking and argumentation skills among learners by giving them short written assignments in which they have to reflect on the most important issues, questions or dilemmas relevant to the learning content. Furthermore, facilitate analytical and research skills by setting assignments in which the learners need to contribute to a specific topic with additional findings and insights relevant to the course. Ask the learners to share their short essays on the forum and to comment on others in order to enable discussions and interactivity in the learning process.
- ▶ **Projects:** Set up assignments in which learners can formulate project proposals and plans for action relevant to the course content. In this way, you can empower participants to think of ways to address a variety of issues and become aware of their own potential in change-making.

CASE STUDY: GRADUATION PROJECT - MY ACTIVISM PLAN

In Impact Europe's final assignment, we set up a form for participants to fill in, in which they had to reflect on the last stage of the course – their active role as citizens in shaping a better future for the European project and formulating their own activist commitment. In this way, they were able to position themselves directly in the political context of our online course and frame their own response to it.

TIP BOX: PEER ASSESSMENT

If you would like learners to 'peer review' one another's assignments, or offer some kind of public feedback/critique, give them a rubric: a set of criteria to help them construct their feedback and to better justify their responses. This not only helps the reviewer to give more effective and constructive feedback, but it also sets reasonable expectations for the writer of the essay as to what kind of feedback they can expect to receive.

Stage 4: Test & improve

Before officially launching your online course, you might consider testing it. We strongly recommend implementing this as a way of ensuring the overall quality and the responsiveness of your course to the target group's needs. Testing enables preliminary feedback from the potential learners and is a good opportunity to detect any technical issues with the platform.

This information is highly beneficial in order to improve the course before its launch. Here are some recommendations based on our experience with testing Impact Europe.



Why test?

The main benefits from testing an online course include:

- ▶ **Getting feedback:** Firstly, testing provides you with direct feedback from the users. You can tailor the testing process, in terms of the content you want to preliminary test. Therefore, you can include specific activities and formats and check the platform's user-friendliness and the visual appeal of the course.
- ▶ **Knowing your audience:** Secondly, testing allows you to get to know your potential audience better while continuing to develop the course. Invite potential learners to take part in the course sample and ask them directly about their preferences and experience with it. You can find out more about who they are by setting up surveys and questionnaires.
- ▶ **Improving the course:** Finally, testing gives you a chance to improve the course before its official launch. It provides valuable information that can guide the process of developing the rest of the course in the right direction, according to your target group's demands.

How to test?

If you are interested in conducting a test of your upcoming online course, here are some suggestions to take into account while planning such a process:

- ▶ **Objectives:** As always, start by setting out what you want to achieve with the test or what aspects of the course you need to assess based on the feedback of potential learners.
- ▶ **Timing:** Plan the testing well in advance. It should be organised as soon as enough content has been developed. Ideally, you should allow substantial time for the testing period, the subsequent analysis of the results and their application. This means it is important to plan the testing phase in parallel with developing the curriculum.

- ▶ **Course sample:** There is no need to test the entire course. Instead, provide a part of it as a test sample. Try to strategically plan the content to be included in the test. Make sure you combine a variety of activities and formats in order to find out if their quality is suitable for your audience.
- ▶ **Get data:** Set up online surveys to collect feedback as data that you can analyse and interpret at a later date. The surveys should be concise and dynamic. Make sure you include different question formats. Each question should have a specific goal in terms of the information you want to acquire. Ask participants for both quantitative and qualitative feedback (ratings of activities and written inputs). To ensure testers' responsiveness to the test, we recommend integrating the survey as the final part of the course sample.
- ▶ **Communicate with the testers:** You can find testers in your network or through an open call for participation. Look for participants who match the profile of the target group. On receiving their contact details, send them invitations directly via email. The style of communication should reflect the context of your online course and the style of its audience. It is also useful to send reminders to the testers during the testing period to ensure their full participation. Motivate your testers by explaining the benefits of your course and by giving them an opportunity to complete the entire course for free as soon as it has been launched.
- ▶ **Benefit from results:** Use the data sets from the surveys to analyse the ratings and feedback from the testers. It is useful to present them in a report in which you highlight the key findings and numerical data with graphs. Furthermore, use the results as your own guide for course improvements. The report can also be used to brief the service providers or project partners about the course progress. Asking testers to report on any technical issues they identify is a good way to ensure the developers have enough time to fix them before the launch.

TIP BOX: ONGOING TESTING

Testing does not begin and end before the course goes live – you can continue testing how well a course is performing by surveying learners at different points in the course, so they can evaluate their experiences and offer feedback. One of the advantages of online courses over conventional curricula is that you can improve your course content immediately, based on the feedback you receive from learners. If you run a course more than once, there is an expectation that each run will improve upon the previous one to some degree.

CASE STUDY: TESTING IMPACT EUROPE

Before officially launching our online course, we tested a sample of the content during two rounds of testing among potential learners selected through our partner networks (youth and national Green organisations across Europe). This enabled us to get feedback on specific aspects of our course, such as its content, functionality and design. We used this information to improve the course platform, add more case studies and increase user interactivity. The test results included:

- ▶ Ensure maximum readability and visibility of the learning platform and learning materials;
- ▶ Include additional case studies and practical examples of the topics discussed during the course;
- ▶ Integrate the forum within the course platform to improve interactivity and the learning experience while carrying out assignments;
- ▶ Introduce direct feedback in the quizzes;
- ▶ Improve the quality of specific activities and formats based on learners' preferences.



Stage 5: Launch & promote

Now we come to the most exciting stage in developing an online course – once the content is ready, it is time to launch and promote your course.



Stage the launch

Before you announce and start promoting the course, a few steps must be completed in order to successfully stage the course launch.

- ▶ **Course title:** Give your course a name! Try to make it catchy, yet comprehensive. Ideally, the title should capture the essential purpose or description of your course in just a few words. A good way to gather ideas about possible names is to organise a brainstorming with your team. You might also consider consulting specialised communications agencies to help you out.

CASE STUDY: ASK YOUR AUDIENCE FOR NAME SUGGESTIONS

We actually asked our audience during the testing phase to suggest names for the course. We included this question as a part of the feedback survey at the end of the test. Having taken their ideas into account, we were pleased to name the course 'Impact Europe: Online Course for Green Activists'.

- ▶ **Course access:** Set up the necessary channels for accessing the course. If registration is obligatory, create the registration form and make sure that it works. If there is an application process, allow enough time for the submission of applications and selection of participants.
- ▶ **Evaluation and feedback:** If you plan to evaluate the course based on learners' feedback, we recommend you prepare the feedback form and add it as the final step in order to complete the course. In this way, you can avoid any lack of responsiveness and ensure the evaluation is based on full participation. There are more tips about the evaluation process in the next stage.
- ▶ **Final check:** Implement a final technical check and make sure everything on the platform works smoothly. One way of doing this is to pretend you are a new user and to test it out yourself. Alternatively, you can ask an external person to go through the course and report back on any issues. This is especially important if you do not initiate any other tests prior to the launch. Where possible, we recommend an external quality assurance. Sometimes this can be provided via the online learning platform, although it may also be by a third party. While these people may not be subject matter specialists, they are able to offer advice on pedagogical and structural issues, plus an objective perspective on course quality.

Announce the course

To officially launch your online course, make a captivating announcement that will be used to promote it online and across your network. There are different ways to compile such a text, but we recommend it includes the following elements:

- ▶ **Context:** Convey the objectives of your course and place it in a wider framework in which you explain its educational, political or social relevance;
- ▶ **Selling points:** Promote the main learning outcomes as the key benefits for potential learners. This is the crucial marketing aspect of your course which can enhance its attractiveness;
- ▶ **Timing, availability and accessibility:** Make sure you explain when and how the course will be available. It is important to announce the time period during which the participants will be able to complete the course and its deadline. Furthermore, give details on how it can be accessed and if there are any fees;
- ▶ **Audience:** Describe the intended audience for the course. Mention any requirements for participation (i.e. age restrictions) or if it is open to everyone. Provide the links for registration or the sign-in page. As always, try to keep the user perspective in mind and think of the information a new user would need to access your online course easily;
- ▶ **Other elements:** In addition, you can include any other distinctive features that might contribute to increasing the reach of the course and interest among its target group. For example, this might include providing the course free of charge, adding some new learning methods (games, interactive videos), contributions from famous speakers, rewarding its successful completion (diplomas, books), access to other courses or opportunities, etc.

Promotion

Once the course has been launched, it is important to consider ways it can reach the desired audience. Here are some suggestions as to how this can be achieved:

- ▶ **Visual materials:** Make posters and flyers that illustrate the visual identity and key information relating to your course. Distribute these online and at places and events where they might attract the attention of your target group.
- ▶ **Online promotion:** In order to plan the online promotion efficiently, prepare a strategy in advance which outlines the objectives and key messages for all communications on social media and other internet channels (websites, newsletter, etc.). Provide information about your online course on your organisation's website. Make sure that the announcement is visible on the site's front page and that it includes links to registration. Furthermore, promote it frequently on social media. Send out calls for participation and use the course content as teasers. Include the selling points of your course and engaging visual materials as posts on Facebook, Twitter and Instagram.
- ▶ **Network support:** Identify the key partners and organisations which might be interested in helping you promote the course. Furthermore, try to find individuals in your network who may have access to channels for spreading information about the course among the target group.
- ▶ **Paid marketing:** If your budget allows, you might consider outsourcing the promotion of the course to an external agency specialising in marketing and public relations (PR).

Communication with learners

A significant process which follows the launch and promotion of your online course is communication with the learners. Here are some recommendations for setting up a regular emailing routine:

- ▶ **Email list:** Create an email list with all the contacts of those who signed up for the course in order to send out general notifications about it, such as potential extensions of the deadline, technical updates or any other relevant news. Make sure to keep this list updated with new participants and their contact details.
- ▶ **Direct contact:** Provide an email address through which the learners can contact you in case they have any questions or issues to report. In this way, your team can directly provide support on an individual basis.
- ▶ **Customised communication based on progress:** An efficient way to motivate learners to complete the course is to send out reminders based on their progress, using the data on the learning progress provided by the hosting platform. Then, customise messages to different categories of learners and create corresponding emailing lists. Write these messages in a positive and supportive tone. Let the learners know about their progress in the course and remind them of the deadlines. In addition, try to motivate them to complete the course by highlighting the key learning benefits or possible rewards (i.e. diplomas, access to an alumni network or other opportunities).
- ▶ **Graduation:** A special moment in communicating with learners is when they complete the entire course. Make sure to congratulate them and thank them for their participation. This is also a good occasion to reward them (i.e. with a diploma) or to provide them with other relevant information (i.e. access to an alumni network, social media groups, upcoming opportunities and projects, etc.).

CASE STUDY: COMMUNICATION WITH IMPACT EUROPE LEARNERS

Between January and May 2017, we reached an audience of 505 learners (the total number of those who signed up to the platform). The hosting platform enabled us to track their progress and, based on this, to communicate with them regularly. We divided the learners into several categories according to their learning progress. Each category had a corresponding emailing list and a customised message (please see in the next table). It is possible to automate parts of this process by triggering an automatic email when a learner achieves a certain level of progress or is inactive for a certain length of time.

CATEGORY	PROGRESS	MESSAGES
Starters (Learners who joined, are not active)	0-10%	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ▶ Welcome to the course. ▶ Provide motivation to continue – highlight the key benefits of the course. ▶ Deadline reminder.
Active learners	10-60%	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ▶ Provide positive acknowledgement of their progress in the course. ▶ Remind them of deadlines and potential rewards.
Super active learners	61-89%	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ▶ Praise their progress in the course and remind them that they are almost finished. ▶ Motivate them to complete the course. ▶ Remind them of deadline and rewards.
Graduates	90-100%	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ▶ Congratulate the learners. ▶ Provide potential rewards. ▶ Include the relevant follow up information.

TIP BOX: DIPLOMAS

A great way to reward those learners who complete the online course is to award a final diploma which officially confirms their successful participation. In the case of Impact Europe, this also proved to be a great motivation among the learners, as the diplomas were signed by the Co-Presidents of the Green European Foundation and the Greens/EFA Group in the European Parliament.

Stage 6: Follow up



Course evolution

To properly assess the success of your course and to take lessons from it for creating other courses in the future, it is important to pay proper attention to the evaluation process. Once the curriculum has been finalised, make sure you set up evaluation surveys as an integrated activity of the online course. In this way, you can ensure responsiveness from learners and gain insights into the successes and failures of the course based on their feedback. The evaluation process can provide different insights, depending on what you need to find out. Based on our experience when evaluating Impact Europe, we recommend focusing on the following aspects:

1 Learners' profile: If you want to establish the demographic and behavioural characteristics of your audience, the best way is to ask them directly. One way of doing this is by adding an introductory survey at the beginning of the course in which you ask the learners to anonymously provide information about their age, origin, residence, education, employment, attitudes, preferences, etc. Analysis of this data will provide for an exhaustive insight into your audience.

2 Learning experience: In order to evaluate the quality of your course, it is important to set up a feedback survey at the end, in which you allow the learners to rate each course activity and to provide written inputs on specific aspects, such as its functionality and visual design. In this way, you can get both quantitative and qualitative data (ratings and written feedback) which you can present as key findings in the final report. This is especially beneficial if you need to share the results with project partners, or if you are interested in producing other online courses in the future.

3 Learning outcomes: Besides the course content, the quality of the learning process can also be evaluated by carrying out a survey among the learners on the impact on their knowledge of specific course topics and issues addressed. This will allow you to assess whether or not the learning goals of your course have eventually been accomplished. This can be done by asking learners to rate their knowledge on specific topics when starting and when having completed the course.

Alumni network

You might consider using audience access to your online course to create an alumni network. Such a group can provide multiple possibilities for fostering links with the audience your course has reached. Here are the main benefits of inviting learners to become alumni:

- ▶ **Maintaining the audience:** Your organisation can benefit by keeping up contacts with the audience reached via the course. You can promote your work among them and invite them to join relevant projects, events or future online courses. Thus, alumni can serve as a steady pool of potential users and participants for your organisation.
- ▶ **Boosting motivation:** Providing access to an alumni network can be motivational and can enhance the attractiveness of the course. Therefore, make sure you explain the precise benefits you would provide for alumni members.
- ▶ **Community building:** Setting up social media groups for alumni members is a great way to encourage further exchanges between the learners beyond your course. To facilitate this, try to organise events or online debates in which the alumni can meet and interact.

New scenarios

If your online course is open for a long period of time, try to think of ways to keep it interesting and relevant. Here are some ideas you might consider:

- ▶ **Keep it up to date:** If your course addresses ongoing issues, make sure that the content is updated regularly with the latest information.
- ▶ **Update content:** Besides the latest novelties, you might even consider introducing new formats or activities to keep your audience's attention. For example, you could schedule occasional live webinars with relevant speakers.
- ▶ **Carry out projects:** Start a project based on the course content in which you invite the learners to participate. This could be a small event or a large transnational initiative, depending on the scope of the course.

- ▶ **Make it participatory:** If there is strong interest among the learners in contributing to your online course, why not involve them in the process of keeping it updated and interesting? This can be done by setting up a volunteer group who can contribute with ideas for new content or even be given the responsibility of facilitating discussions in a forum.
- ▶ **Develop new courses:** If your course proves to be a success and you want to continue in the same direction, consider drawing up other online courses. For example, this could be an advanced version of the previous course, a specialised course based on a relevant part of the previous course, or it could be an entirely different course.

There are numerous possibilities and we hope that this guidebook proves useful if you decide to pursue one of the above-mentioned scenarios.

CASE STUDY: RESULTS OF IMPACT EUROPE

During the first 4 months since the launch of Impact Europe, the course has reached out to 505 learners, and the feedback received was overwhelmingly positive, with more than 90% of the learners finding the course “good” and “very good”. On top of this, evaluation surveys revealed that the main learning objectives have been achieved in the case of over 80% of the learners.

This has reinforced our belief that online learning can be used as a tool for advancing political activism and engagement of citizens with European politics. As for GEF's future plans, we have decided to keep promoting Impact Europe, aiming to reach between 1500-2000 learners in the first year.

Engaging in the development of an online course can support your organisation's mission. We hope that this guide serves as an inspiration during your own development process and we wish you a successful online learning project!

If you have further questions or would like to exchange with the authors, don't hesitate to contact the Green European Foundation (you can find our contact details on the following page).





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