

Innosuisse

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# Holistic Analysis of the Innosuisse Start-up Training Programme

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Management Summary – English

**econcept**  
Forschung / Beratung / Evaluation

econcept AG  
Gerechtigkeitsgasse 20  
CH-8002 Zürich

  
S T R A T E G O S

Strategos SA  
Rue Marterey 1  
1005 Lausanne

 **AUSTRIAN INSTITUT  
OF TECHNOLOGY**

Austrian Institute of Tech-  
nology GmbH  
Giefinggasse 4  
A-1210 Wien

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**The responsibility for this project towards the client lay with econcept AG.**

**econcept AG**

Ethan Gertel, MA of International Political Economy  
Katharina Brandenberger, Dr. phil., MA in Political Science  
Julie Agosti, MSc Conflict Resolution and Governance  
Linda Mülli, Dr. phil., MA in History

Barbara Haering, Prof. Dr. sc. nat. ETH, Dr. h. c. sc. pol.

**AIT**

Karl-Heinz Leitner, Prof. Dr. rer. soc. oec.  
Georg Zahradnik, Mag. rer. soc. oec.  
Sabine Neuberger, Ph.D. Business Economics, Dipl. Ing.

**Strategos**

Sandra With, MPA Harvard, lic. oec. HSG VWL

## Management Summary

### *Objective of the holistic analysis of the Innosuisse Start-up Training Programme*

The objective of the analysis was to assess impact and relevance of the Innosuisse Start-up Training Programme (the Programme) and thus, to support Innosuisse regarding the development of a needs- and future-oriented, impactful, and complementary Programme in accordance with the subsidiarity principle and in synergy with all other offerings of Innosuisse. The analysis consisted of three parts

- Evaluation of the Programme with regards to sensitisation and training
- Identification of needs and trends in entrepreneurial education
- National and international benchmarking of the Programme

### *Project design in a nutshell*

The project started with kick-off meetings with Innosuisse and with a preliminary overview of documents and data. This led to a detailed inception report. Based on the inception report, the holistic analysis addressed the impact and relevance of the Programme, needs and trends in entrepreneurial education as well as national and international benchmarks. The evaluation included expert interviews, an extensive online survey, in-depth biographical interviews as well as national and international analysis. The final phase of the project was dedicated to synthesising the results in terms of an overarching perspective. A workshop with the support group enabled a reflection on the evaluation results and on future developments of the programme.

### *Assessment of the Programme*

The analysis leads to a positive assessment of the Programme. The results underline its high reputation among both former participants as well as national and international experts. The programme has become an important pillar of Innosuisse' multifaceted start-up support and is well embedded in the national start-up ecosystem. As a nationwide training offering, the Programme offers a national benchmark. At the same time, its anchoring in the regional higher education systems ensures that specific aspects of the regional ecosystems are addressed. Furthermore, the Programme serves as a platform and thus also impacts training offers by other providers. At the same time, the national approach can be nurtured by a diverse experience – also regarding other supporting instruments of Innosuisse.

### *Recommendations*

Success and reputation can be taken as starting points for further developments of the Programme.

**Developing a national start-up training strategy:** Thanks to its experience and position as a market leader in supporting science-based start-ups, its strong involvement in start-up ecosystems in Switzerland, Innosuisse is predestined to collect and exchange best practices on start-up training and to network trainers and coaches. The development of a national start-up training strategy could be a door-opener to share these experiences with other countries and to promote the Swiss start-up ecosystem beyond Switzerland. Cooperating with Swissnex could be interesting in this regard.

**Maintaining a comprehensive and mission-based Programme:** The Programme is well structured and comprehensive. The modular structure has proven to be successful and should be maintained. Covering all stages of the development of a start-up is one of the specifics of the Programme hardly any other provider is offering. Trainings are key to acquire knowledge, skills and know-how in terms of business and market rules. Interdisciplinary groups, engaging among peers, learning from coaches, are essential elements and should be kept as well. An adaptation worth considering would be to offer additional coaching opportunities in Module 2. Industry-specialised courses within Module 3 and 4 have already been implemented, as requested by respondents.

**Enlarging target groups:** The development of a national start-up training strategy could also serve to redefine the target groups of the Programme – while maintaining a focus on science and technology-based start-ups. In addition to the prevailing ETH and university graduates, graduates from universities of applied science become increasingly interesting as target group, since their research projects are application oriented. However, this would mean a repositioning also in terms of the profile of universities of applied sciences, since fostering entrepreneurship has not been set as one of their specific goals by politics. Moreover, various results of the evaluation lead to the assessment «the earlier the better» – both regarding the age of training participants as well as the development stage of the start-up. However, addressing high-school students needs different approaches than the science-based Programme offered by Innosuisse.

Women are underrepresented also in the start-up field. Due to socio-cultural aspects, they feel less addressed and welcomed in the start-up world and hence also in training courses. They tend to underestimate their potential, they are less confident and at the same time both, more risk aware and more risk averse. In view of strengthening entrepreneurial attitudes, start-ups and economic growth in Switzerland, their potential must be better exploited through coaching, training, networking, and by offering role models.

**Sustainability and social entrepreneurship:** Becoming an entrepreneur or supporting a start-up financially is a powerful way to make a difference in this world. Thus, fostering entrepreneurial mind sets has a societal impact beyond the start-up ecosystem, particularly if embracing sustainability in its broad understanding not just as a challenge but also as

an important field of growth. Thus, Innosuisse could more actively follow trends and developments regarding sustainability, social entrepreneurship, and social responsibility, as observed in the EU-context and initiated by the SDGs of the UN.

**Maintaining a shared responsibility for the Programme:** We recommend maintaining the established division of responsibilities between the national framework for the Programme and the operational responsibilities of regional providers integrated in the higher education system of Switzerland – and to base this cooperation on a national start-up training strategy. Moving away from the current approach could therefore result in the loss of both, the national quality benchmark and the possibility of learning from regional specificities. To strengthen diversity within the start-up ecosystem, possibilities to include more diverse and also smaller training providers should be considered.

**Strengthening coaching opportunities:** The results of the analysis indicate a particular interest and an additional need for coaching opportunities. In view of the structure of the programme, Module 2 is particularly suitable for this. Participants of Module 2 already have a basic project idea; however, they need an early reality check as well as specific guidance to successfully advance with their project. Furthermore, offering more coaching within the modules or at least linking participants to other coaching offers has the potential to bridge the gap perceived between Module 4 and the later stage of funding processes.

**«Digital is here to stay» but direct contacts remain important:** Based on the experiences made during the Covid-19 pandemic, we recommend enhancing digital learning tools while keeping enough room for physical interactions. However, direct contacts among peers as well as with experienced entrepreneurs during on-site training sessions remain crucial in view of early reality checks, finding potential business partners, networking and being exposed to an entrepreneurial environment.

**Synergies with other Innosuisse offers:** Innosuisse has a comprehensive and coherent set of support offers for start-ups. While some synergies between these offers are already being captured, there remains potential to use these synergies more strategically and effectively. Moreover, Innosuisse' support for start-ups should be translated into a proactive and comprehensive marketing. This would help providers to promote Innosuisse offerings in a targeted way and not just as one offer among others. At the same time, it could improve the experience of participants by raising their awareness for Innosuisse and its various support services.