

AI PIONEERS

Artificial Intelligence in education & training

Long-term action plan for the progressive roll-out of project deliverables after the project has finished and their incorporation into the mainstream

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Introduction

D6.2 Long-term action plan for the progressive roll-out of project deliverables after the project has finished and their incorporation into the mainstream

The ambition of the AI Pioneers project is that the research results and analysis achieved throughout the project, should influence the Adult and Vocational Education and Training (VET) education stakeholders in adapting trustworthy and ethical AI applications in their policies and practice and steer their progress towards AI based innovation in education. In this way, the project aims to strengthen the capacities of teachers, trainers, educational providers and planners and policy makers benefiting from the project's results, to make informed decisions about the use of AI.

Background

The objectives for the AI Pioneers project were based around the capacity of VET and Adult Education around AI. The project set out to address the issues of capacity, both systemic and institutional, through working with teachers and trainers, educational planners, stakeholders, and policy makers in Adult Education and VET, to:

- Identify, develop and pilot use cases of artificial intelligence in education and training including considering their impact on data, privacy, ethics and EU values.
- Produce recommendations, toolkits and implementation guidelines on the role and use of artificial intelligence.
- To develop a sustainable approach to supporting the mainstreaming of AI in education

The quality of the project results and a targeted and effective dissemination and exploitation strategy that would reach policy makers, adult and VET education institutes and organisations, educational planners and stakeholders, was seen as key to sustainability and the mainstreaming and implementation of the project outputs at systemic and practice level across EU countries. The main element of sustainability was seen to be the Reference Network of AI Pioneers. Ensuring the sustainability of the AI Pioneers network and its activities will rely heavily on how well the activities add value to policy-makers, education and training providers and key industry stakeholders.

The project application was submitted in March 2022 and the project started in January 2023. November 2022 saw the launch of ChatGPT, leading to the widespread takeup of Generative AI applications. Despite Generative AI being a general technology, its impact on education was and continues to be rapid and contentious. In this Sustainability report, we will consider to what extent the AI Pioneers project has met its original goals and to what extent our ambitions for sustainability are still relevant.

Rationale: AI and VET

Since 2022, the impact of Generative AI technologies on education has been immense. It has dominated conferences and discussion over the future of education. In higher education, the impact of Generative AI has caused a major review of methods of assessment. At a national level, European countries have produced strategies and recommendations for the use of AI in education. The EU has also produced recommendations on AI in education, although they predate Generative AI and are presently being revised. UNESCO has developed a Competence Framework for teachers and trainers and for students on AI. Ethical issues have emerged as a major concern, and education is considered by the EU as a high risk in its AI Act legislation, coming into effect in 2026. At a research level, the LinkedIn social network has emerged as the main centre of debate over AI, both for advocates and those more sceptical over what is increasingly seen as a technology bubble.

However, while there were widespread discussions about Generative AI in the Higher Education and School sectors, such debate was limited for both Adult education and Vocational Education and Training. It may be that this was because of the far smaller research community in the Adult and VET sectors. It may also be because Adult and VET institutions are often relatively small. And at a policy level, both areas of education are often sidelined.

One of the first activities undertaken by the AI Pioneers project was to launch a survey of VET teachers and trainers about AI. This was part of the research into the competences for VET and adults education teachers and trainers in AI. One of the questions asked was whether their institution had a strategy for AI. From the sample of 310 teachers and trainers, only 26 per cent had such a strategy. Further interviews and case studies revealed that most innovation and adoption of AI for teaching and learning was motivated by the interest and initiative of individual educationalists, often without the knowledge of managers. Yet, it could be argued that VET is the most important sector for AI. In VET, AI, as in other sectors, is a tool for teaching and training. But in VET, AI is also a subject for the curriculum, and adoption of AI in the wider field of the economy and work will require new skills and new curricula. This dual function for VET is an exception in the education sector.

It has been notable that in case studies, early adoption of AI within the curriculum has appeared to be in Information technology, graphic Design, Marketing and engineering subjects. The explanation would appear to be that these are the industries and occupations with early adoption of AI. But how AI is being used in the sectors and occupations varies greatly. This reveals a challenge that curricula will need to be updated for many different vocational programmes dependent on the specific uses of AI and consequently skill demands. It is important to note that we are still in an early phase of this curriculum updating and innovation. Account should also be taken that work based learning is a key aspect of VET, although how this will impact on VET programmes use of AI is still to become apparent.

There has been less response from teachers and trainers in the Adult Education sector. However, there is a major take up of AI for language teaching^{1 2}. And a new Erasmus project, AI Cookbook³, is investigating how teachers and trainers for refugees are using AI.

Research, including our own literature review, survey and interviews⁴ into the take-up of digital technologies in education have frequently cited resistance⁵ for teachers and trainers as a potential block⁶. We have found no such resistance in the VET sector. However, there is a widespread need and demand for professional development and support, and despite the increasing availability of webinars and online events, a lack of opportunities for structured professional development continues. This is despite the development and publication of competence in using AI, including AI Pioneers supplement to the DigCompEdu Framework and the Unesco AI Framework for educators.

In this section, we have outlined the key role of the VET sector in developing programmes around the use of AI in different occupational areas and the relative lack of research and development in AI in VET. In the next section, we will outline the work undertaken by the AI Pioneers in considering the base for sustainability.

¹ UNESCO institute for lifelong learning (2022). From radio to artificial intelligence: review of innovative technology in literacy and education for refugees, migrants and internally displaced persons. <https://doi.org/10.54675/KZH18494>

² Exploring attitudes to generative AI in education for English as an additional language (EAL) adult learners <https://www.cambridge.org/core/journals/recall/article/exploring-attitudes-to-generative-ai-in-education-for-english-as-an-additional-language-eal-adult-learners/F23CE73F4B70F7264D2DDF9655D14002>

³ AI-Enhanced Learning Cookbook for Empowering Migrants <https://www.aicookbook.eu/>

⁴ <https://aipioneers.org/supplement-to-the-digcompedu-framework/>

⁵ Against the Uncritical Adoption of 'AI' Technologies in Academia <https://doi.org/10.5281/zenodo.17065098>

⁶ McGehee, N. (2024). *Breaking Barriers: A Meta-Analysis of Educator Acceptance of AI Technology in Education*. Michigan Virtual. <https://michiganvirtual.org/research/publications/breaking-barriers-a-meta-analysis-of-educator-acceptance-of-ai-technology-in-education/>

AI Pioneers Activities

The release of ChatGPT in November 2022 and the subsequent proliferation of powerful Generative AI Models including those from Google, Anthropic, Facebook and DeepSeek as well as the incorporation of AI in a wide number of consumer products, plus additionally the development of AI products customised for supporting teachers, marked a major change in the context for the AI Pioneers project. While it had been anticipated that AI Pioneers would have a major task in explaining the potential of AI, the momentum was to a large extent reversed especially with regional and European bodies approaching AI Pioneers for assistance.

Despite this, or even because of it, the formal objectives of the AI Pioneers project and the outcomes remained largely appropriate.

The task of developing a Supplement to the DigCompEdu was hugely relevant with the increased demand for professional development for teachers and trainers. The supplement has been downloaded over 10,000 times and there are ongoing discussions with the JRC regarding a new version of DigCompEdu. There have also been webinars and workshops around the Supplement.

The AI toolkit, which is available in multiple languages, has also proved relevant and popular. It is also being updated, necessary given the speed for development of AI over the lifetime of the project. At the time of writing, there are 453 articles in the toolkit.

The report and handbook on ethical issues has also located the AI Pioneers project at the centre of discussions around AI in Vocational Education and Training.

AI Pioneers have held regular, well attended webinars, including six reference network seminars at a European level and over 30 events across the different Partner countries. The project website, including case studies of practice, has a high level of usage.

The level of activity and the high profile for the project has led to cooperation with other networks and with European organisations. This includes:

- AI Pioneers Partners were participants in the European Digital Education Hub 'squad' on Explainable AI (xAI) in Education and the working group to revise the European Ethical Guidelines on AI in education.
- The AI Pioneers project is collaborating with the European Training Foundation Open Space New Learning Club on Teaching with AI
- AI Pioneers Partners presented a Keynote to a meeting of the Council of Europe's conference of Democracy in VET and are continuing to collaborate around the implications of AI for this area of work.
- The AI Pioneers project has worked in close collaboration with the European Digital Education Network (EDEN) who are a partner in the project and this has resulted in regular invitations to present online and at the EDEN conference.

- AI Pioneers partners are members of the EU Working Group developing an updated version of the EU Guidelines on AI in Education.
- Localised webinars and networking events are carried out in partner languages to facilitate ideas and resource sharing on a national level.



AI Pioneers Supplement
to DigCompEdu



AI Pioneers Toolkit

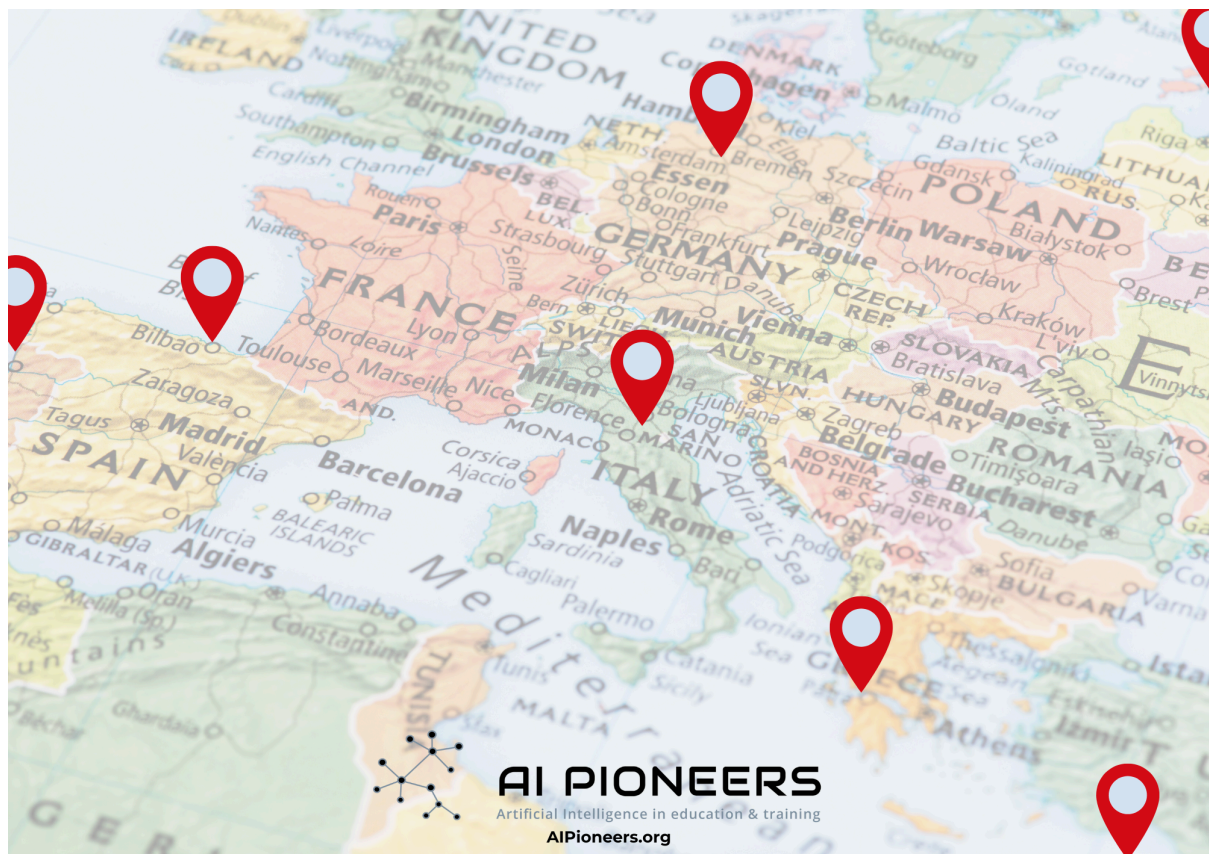


AI Pioneers Ethics
Schema and Handbook



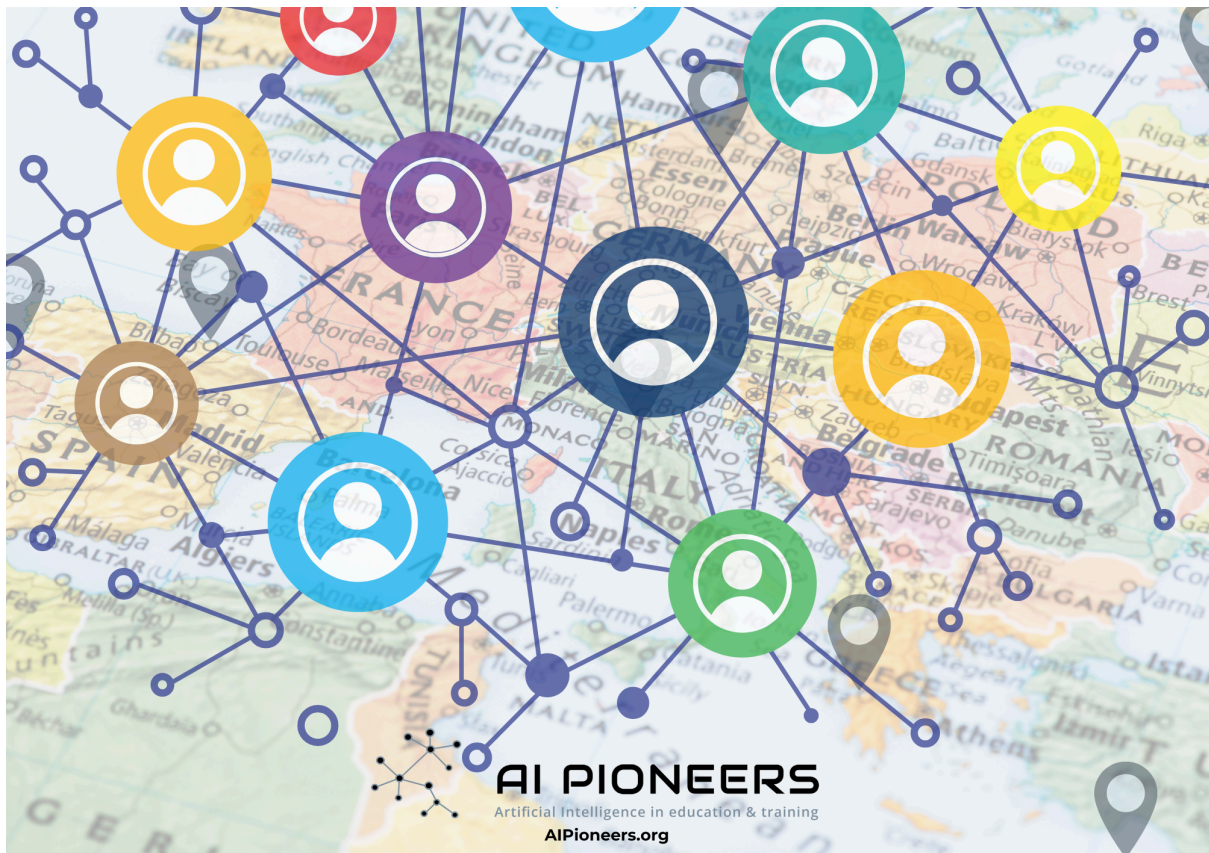
AI Pioneers Network

AI Pioneers Reference Network



Central to the project has been the development of the AI Pioneers Reference Network. This has not been without issues. It was originally intended to use a social networking application for the network. Yet experimenting with two different applications, Mastodon and the EPAL platform, resulted in limited take-up. It may be that the usability of the platforms was an issue in this, with a learning curve for those wishing to participate. It may also be that potential participants do not see social networking applications as appropriate for their needs. Instead, AI Pioneers has developed a group on LinkedIn which has cultivated an image of a professional platform as opposed to say Facebook or Tik Tok. It is interesting to note that LinkedIn has emerged as the major exchange point for discussions and research on the use of AI in education as a whole. AI Pioneers now has 1040+ registered followers on LinkedIn. Regular LinkedIn postings have been complemented by regular Webinars using Zoom and providing an opportunity for discussion on key issues such as ethics. The project has also launched a weekly newsletter, based on a plugin on the Wordpress project website. The newsletter, the content of which is drawn from the website blog, now has 380+ subscribers. These multiple approaches are seen as providing a potential ecosystem for a sustainable network.

Sustaining AI Pioneers



We believe that the AI Pioneers project has shown the need for an ongoing network for AI in Vocational Education and Training. It is interesting that in wider AI initiatives in education, AI Pioneers partners have emerged as the de facto representatives of the VET sector.

Based on the identified gap in dedicated support for AI in vocational education, a draft sustainability plan was formulated for consultation. This initial proposal outlined a future for the network as a member-based, not-for-profit European Special Interest Group.

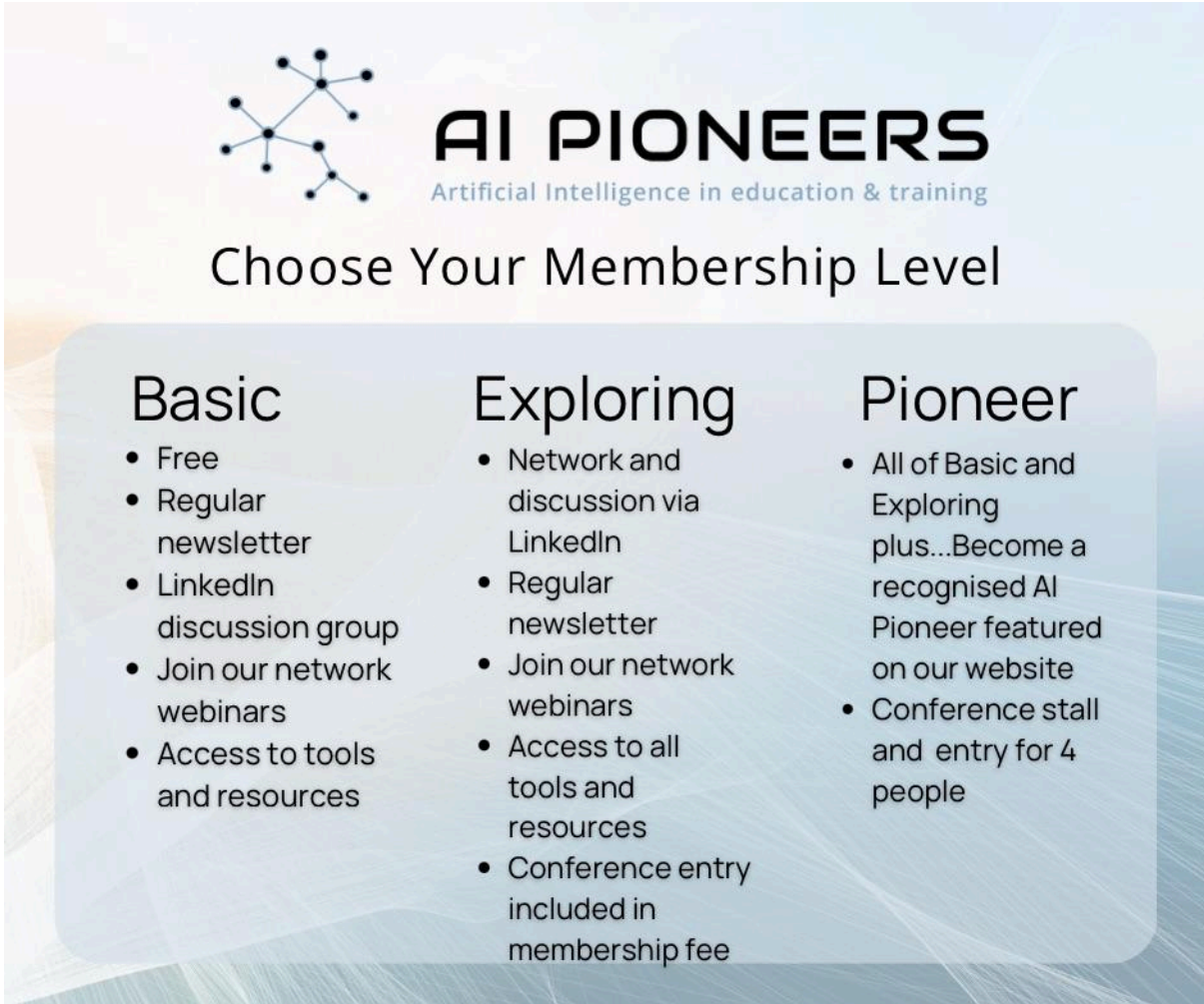
The core of the planning methodology was a structured consultation with project partners to come up with a practical strategy to realise the sustainability goals. Partners were asked to specify what tangible support they could offer, assess the internal sustainability of the model within their organisations, and provide input on suitable legal structures. Their concrete commitments, which included managing webinars, producing content, and maintaining digital platforms, were collated to form the activity base for the first year of the post-funding period network activity.

The final plan, as follows, was elaborated directly from these partner offers, creating a phased, twelve-month activity schedule designed to mitigate risk by first formalising the network and demonstrating value to the existing community before expanding its reach. This evidence-based and co-creative approach ensures the resulting strategy is both ambitious and operationally feasible, transforming the project into a self-sustaining community of practice built on a foundation of concrete activities.

1. Formalising the AI Pioneers network organisation and membership

AI Pioneers will continue as a European Special Interest Group run by a not for profit company. It will be based on a tiered membership (Individual, Organisation, Free, Premium) structure with both paid and free content. We will use our existing mailing list and social channels to recruit the membership as well as following up with all attendees of webinars and our project conference.

The organisation will be constituted appropriately using A statute for European cross-border associations and non-profit organizations⁷, Comparing European Corporate Governance Models, 2022⁸, and other relevant documentation as guidance. The structure and governance shall be agreed during the first annual general meeting of the group.

The graphic features the AI Pioneers logo at the top left, which consists of a network of nodes connected by lines. To the right of the logo, the text 'AI PIONEERS' is written in a large, bold, black font, with the tagline 'Artificial Intelligence in education & training' in a smaller, blue font below it. The main heading 'Choose Your Membership Level' is centered below the logo. The content is organized into three columns, each with a heading and a list of benefits. The 'Basic' column lists: Free, Regular newsletter, LinkedIn discussion group, Join our network webinars, and Access to tools and resources. The 'Exploring' column lists: Network and discussion via LinkedIn, Regular newsletter, Join our network webinars, Access to all tools and resources, and Conference entry included in membership fee. The 'Pioneer' column lists: All of Basic and Exploring plus...Become a recognised AI Pioneer featured on our website, and Conference stall and entry for 4 people. The background of the graphic is a light blue gradient with abstract white lines.

AI PIONEERS
Artificial Intelligence in education & training

Choose Your Membership Level

Basic	Exploring	Pioneer
<ul style="list-style-type: none">• Free• Regular newsletter• LinkedIn discussion group• Join our network webinars• Access to tools and resources	<ul style="list-style-type: none">• Network and discussion via LinkedIn• Regular newsletter• Join our network webinars• Access to all tools and resources• Conference entry included in membership fee	<ul style="list-style-type: none">• All of Basic and Exploring plus...Become a recognised AI Pioneer featured on our website• Conference stall and entry for 4 people

Example of potential tiered membership options

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[https://www.europarl.europa.eu/RegData/etudes/STUD/2021/693439/IPOL_STU\(2021\)693439_EN.pdf](https://www.europarl.europa.eu/RegData/etudes/STUD/2021/693439/IPOL_STU(2021)693439_EN.pdf)

f

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https://accountancyeurope.eu/wp-content/uploads/2022/12/Corporate_governance_models_survey_publication2022.pdf?v1

2. Maintain and develop the technical infrastructure for the network

As we outlined above, the developing practice of the AI Pioneers project has evolved an infrastructure. Although stable, there is a requirement for ongoing maintenance. However, technology is not the major focus. More important is to maintain the blog, bulletin, newsletter and the LinkedIn page. Regular online events will keep people involved and we can ask for contributions to the blog from network members. We will improve the look and style of the email bulletin by using dedicated software such as Ghost or Action Network. We will also investigate finding an application for exchanging experiences and ideas and for time limited discussions on an asynchronous basis such as discord or slack.

3. What is needed and what would it look like?

The AI Pioneers website will be redefined as a hub for all AI VET projects to exchange knowledge, practices and ideas. It will be developed as a VET specific space for the exchange of knowledge, practice and ideas. The website should be redefined as a portal to other projects, resources, and networking. This would mean both signposting other projects from the portal but also inviting other projects to contribute content and events as well as participating in discussion and exchange of practice.

AI Pioneers will also continue to host regular webinars and the blog based bulletin as well as a 6 monthly newsletter.

All founder members will agree to support the ongoing work of the project and new members will be invited to contribute to the success of the platform.

Partner	Sustainability offer
Pontydysgu	Fortnightly blog post and overall responsibility for the bulletin. Organising 2 webinars per year. Promoting AI Pioneers at events.
ITB	Content contributions and posts on the AI Pioneers LinkedIn page. Creating synergies between AI Pioneers and other future AI projects. Present project results and promote AI Pioneers in conferences during the year following the project end. Organise an annual AI Day for the German community of practice to stay in touch with vocational schools about their AI activities.
ACP	Maintain the hosting and management of the website. Organize 1-2 webinars. Experiment with AI Generated video and podcasts.
UPV/EHU	Provide content for the AI Pioneers LinkedIn page and bulletin.

	Organize a conference on AI Pioneers matters.
EDEN	Content for the AI Pioneers LinkedIn page. Invite members to deliver presentations at annual online events organised by EDEN DLE, such as European Online and Distance Learning Week (EODLW), Open Education Week (OEW), or NAP webinars.
BIBB	Organise 1-2 webinars per year. Promote AI Pioneers at events.
CSI	Organise 1-2 webinars or f2f events Share content from the AI pioneers network on CSI's social media Initiate contact with more universities for network collaboration
CNOS-FAP	Content contributions and posts on the AI Pioneers LinkedIn page. Create synergies between AI Pioneers and other future AI projects. Present project results and promote AI Pioneers in conferences during the year following the project end. Promote the use of the toolkit in VET courses. Invite new schools and training institutions to join the network.
TecMinho	Contribute content for the Blog and LinkedIn. Make and signpost connections with other projects and networks. Maintain overall responsibility for the AI Pioneers Network Webinars organization (6 per year). Open up the AI Pioneers network in Portugal. Engage new individual and organizational members. Contribute to the annual face to face conference.
University of Verona	Strengthen collaboration with Italian universities and VET providers to broaden the AI Pioneers network. Produce scholarly outputs and practice-oriented case studies on AI in higher and vocational education. Disseminate project results and represent AI Pioneers at conferences, webinars, and professional events. Curate and publish updates on the AI Pioneers LinkedIn page and related channels to sustain community engagement. Undertake targeted outreach to institutions and research centers to build partnerships and synergies with ongoing and future AI initiatives. Promote the adoption of the AI Pioneers toolkit and ensure its continuous enhancement with new resources and examples.

4. Network activities plan

Overarching Goal for Year 1: To successfully launch the AI Pioneers network as a formal, member-driven entity, providing clear value to the emergent community of practice, while laying the groundwork for financial sustainability.

Year 1 Aims

Formalise & Launch: Establish the legal and governance structure and publicly launch the network.

Member Recruitment & Engagement: Convert existing followers into formal members and actively grow the community.

Deliver Consistent Value: Facilitate a curated calendar of high-quality activities based on the sustainability offers from partners.

Strengthen Foundations: Develop the infrastructure and partnerships for long-term growth.

Phase 1 (Months 1-3) – Foundation & Launch

Formalise the network structure and re-engage the existing community.

M1 Governance & Structure:

Finalise and ratify the draft governance document.

Outline roles, responsibilities and accountability mechanisms

Officially establish the not-for-profit entity or European SIG structure.

Define clear membership tiers (Free, Individual Premium, Organisational) and their benefits.

Set up a simple financial system for membership fees (if applicable).

Tech Setup:

Transition the newsletter to a dedicated platform like Ghost or Mailchimp for a more professional look.

Set up a GDPR compliant membership database

Update the website to reflect the new structure

Risk management

M2 Member Onboarding Plan:

Create a formal "Join Us" page on the website with clear benefits.

Develop a welcome email sequence for new members.

Map out the process to migrate the LinkedIn followers and newsletter subscribers to registered members.

Content Planning:

Create an editorial calendar for the blog, LinkedIn, and newsletter for the next 6 months.

M3 Launch to Existing Community:

Announce the formal launch of the sustainable AI Pioneers network via the newsletter and LinkedIn.

Open membership registration, initially targeting the existing follower base.

Launch the first "Premium" member-only benefit (e.g., a recorded webinar, a toolkit resource).

Webinar 1: Host a "Launch Event & Year Ahead" webinar to present the vision and gather feedback.

Risk Management

Phase 2: (Months 4-6) – Demonstrate Value & Grow

Carry out the planned activities to show value and begin active membership growth.

M4 Activity Kick-off:

Pontydysgu: Publish the first weekly blog post under the new structure.

ITB: Launch a dedicated "AI in VET Discussion Series" on the LinkedIn page (e.g., weekly prompt questions).

Podcast/Video Experiment: ACP experiments with the first AI-generated video or podcast teaser.

M5 Focus on Engagement:

Webinar 2: Partner-led webinar on a 'hot topic'

Call for Contributions: Actively invite members to contribute case studies or blog posts about their AI use.

Begin promoting the UPV/EHU conference (scheduled for later in the year).

M6 Review & Adjust: Analyse membership growth and engagement metrics (newsletter open rates, webinar attendance).

Send a mid-year survey to members: "What value are you getting? What do you need more of?"

Webinar 3: A "Ask Me Anything" open discussion session with the AI Pioneers core team based on survey feedback.

Phase 3: (Months 7-9) – Expand & Collaborate

Broaden the network's reach through partnerships and high-profile content.

M7 Partnership Activation:

Formalise a collaboration with one key partner (e.g., EDEN for a joint webinar during European Online and Distance Learning Week).

Webinar 4: Co-host a webinar with the European Training Foundation (ETF) or another organisation.

M8 Content Amplification: Release the first major piece of premium content (e.g., a curated "Starter Kit for AI in VET" ebook for premium members).

ITB: Present AI Pioneers results at an external conference, driving membership.

Pontydysgu: Use the bulletin to showcase member-contributed case studies.

M9 Major Event: Host the UPV/EHU Conference on AI Pioneers matters (virtual or hybrid). This becomes the flagship event of the year, free for members, paid for non-members.

Phase 4: (Months 10-12) – Consolidate & Plan Ahead

Secure the community, demonstrate impact, and plan for Year 2.

M10 Membership Drive: Launch a targeted membership campaign based on success stories from the year.

Offer an early-bird discount for Year 2 premium membership renewals.

M11 Showcase & Report:

Webinar 5: Annual review webinar showcasing the year's top insights and member achievements.

Publish a "Year One Impact Report" highlighting community growth, events held, and resources created.

M12 Strategic Planning for Year 2:

Finalise the activity plan and budget for Year 2 based on Year 1 learnings and revenue.

Confirm partner commitments for the next year.

Webinar 6: A forward-looking session on "AI Trends in VET for Next Year."

Risks and Mitigation

A primary risk is partner fatigue and resource dilution, where the initial enthusiasm and in-kind contributions from core partners diminish over time as new priorities emerge. To mitigate this, the network should formalise partner commitments in a memorandum of understanding and begin cultivating a broader base of contributors. This will mean actively recruiting new member organisations and volunteers to share the workload, and incentivising partner involvement, such as by sharing their contributions with a wide audience, and signposting partner projects.

Financial sustainability presents another significant risk, particularly an over-reliance on a single revenue stream such as membership fees, which may not materialise as expected. The mitigation strategy is to diversify income sources from the outset. This could include seeking grants for specific projects, offering paid consultancy services, charging non-members for flagship events like the annual conference, and exploring corporate sponsorship for particular activities (ie. conference exhibitions) or publications, thereby building a more resilient financial base.

Finally, there is a substantial risk of low member engagement and retention if the network fails to consistently demonstrate its value, leading to stagnant growth and a weak business case for continuation. The plan mitigates this by prioritising a curated calendar of high-quality, relevant activities based directly on the expressed needs of the VET community. Implementing a regular feedback loop through surveys and open forums will ensure the network remains responsive, while a clear communication plan that highlights success stories and member benefits will help to reinforce the value proposition and encourage active participation.

Proposed Timeline for Key Deliverables (Gantt Chart View)

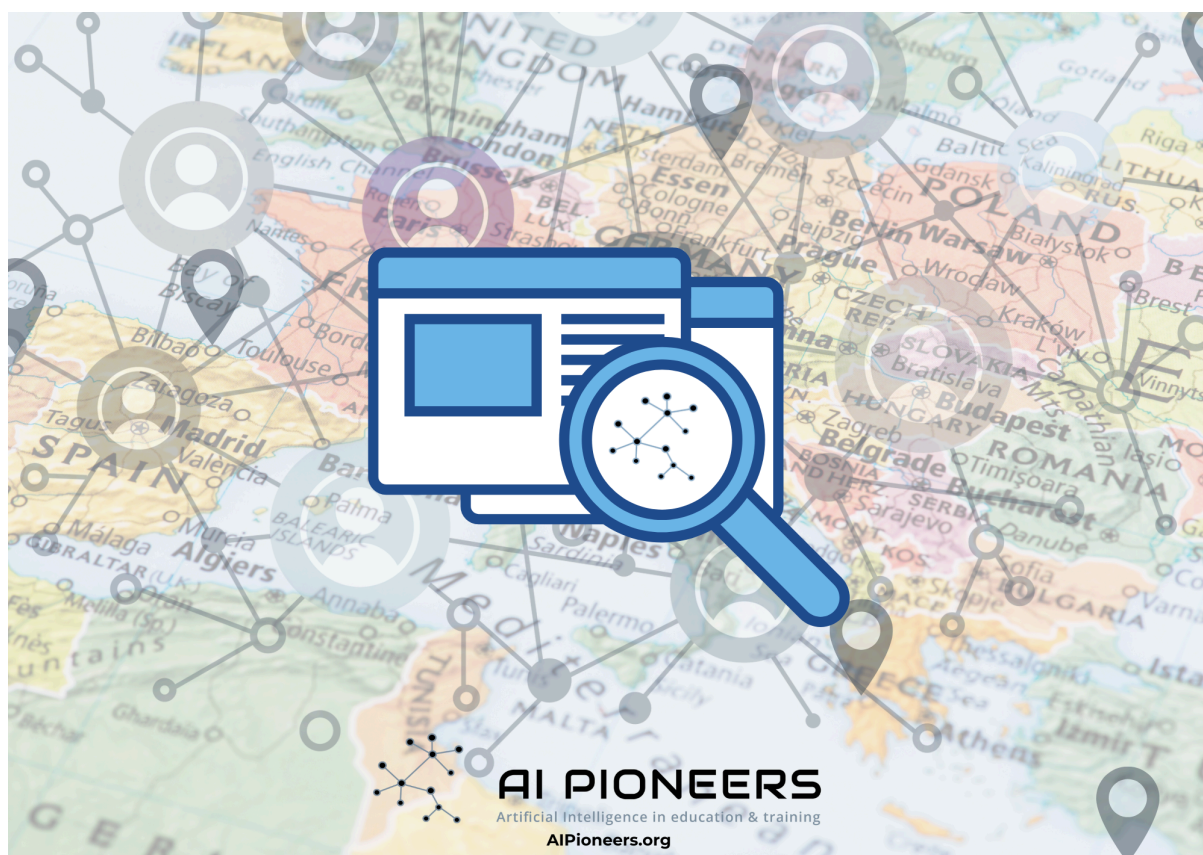
Activity	(M1-3)	(M4-6)	(M7-9)	(M10-12)
Governance Finalised	✓			
Membership Portal Live	✓			
Newsletter Platform Migrated	✓			
Weekly LinkedIn Engagement		✓	✓	✓
Weekly Blog Posts	✓	✓	✓	✓
Webinars (6 per year)	1	2	1	2
Member Contribution Drive		✓	✓	
Partner Co-hosted Webinar			✓	
Annual Conference			✓	
Premium Content Release			✓	
Impact Report & Year 2 Planning				✓

5. Further Develop cooperation with other organisations and networks

We will seek to further develop cooperation with other networks and organisations.

A cornerstone of the network's sustainability strategy involves proactively developing cooperation with other key organisations and networks. We will strengthen existing ties and forge new collaborations with major European bodies including the European Digital Education Hub, the Council of Europe, the European Training Foundation (ETF), the EU Joint Research Centre (JRC), the European Digital Education Network (EDEN), the European Vocational education and Training Network (VETNET) and the European association of Technology Enhanced Learning (EATEL), while also building partnerships at a national level.

A critical function of this outreach will be to position AI Pioneers as a trusted advisory body, helping VET stakeholders navigate and prepare for compliance with the forthcoming EU AI Act. Furthermore, we will explore mutually beneficial partnerships with EdTech companies for potential sponsorships or joint events, with clear safeguards to maintain the network's independent and impartial voice, thereby solidifying our role as a pivotal actor in shaping AI policy and practice for VET across Europe.



And Finally

This sustainability plan charts a purposeful and pragmatic course for the AI Pioneers network, transitioning it from a successful project into an indispensable, self-sustaining community of practice. By building upon a strong foundation of proven demand and concrete partner commitments, and by adopting a phased, risk-aware approach to growth, the network is positioned to secure its long-term future. Ultimately, this strategy ensures the AI Pioneers community will continue to serve as the vital, central hub for expertise, collaboration, and innovation in Artificial Intelligence for Vocational Education and Training across Europe and beyond, fulfilling a critical need for years to come.