SUB-SECTION II. ANALYSIS OF THE CURRENT STATE OF PEACE EDUCATION

Good practices in partner countries – GERMANY

COUNTRY

Germany

NAME OF GOOD PRACTICE

DBU Green Start-up Programme (Green Start-up Förderung)

ORGANISATION RESPONSIBLE

Deutsche Bundesstiftung Umwelt (German Federal Environmental Foundation, DBU)

WEBSITE/REFERENCE LINK

https://www.dbu.de/en/promotion/green-start-up/

YEAR OF IMPLEMENTATION

2019 – Ongoing

TYPE OF PRACTICE

- Sustainable Entrepreneurship Initiative
- Green Innovation Programme
- Incubator / Accelerator (Start-up Support)
- Entrepreneurship Training
- Innovation Ecosystem Initiative

BACKGROUND

The DBU Green Start-up Programme is a national funding and support scheme operated by the Deutsche Bundesstiftung Umwelt (German Federal Environmental Foundation), one of Europe's largest environmental foundations. The programme was established to strengthen green entrepreneurship in Germany by supporting founding teams that develop environmentally friendly, innovative and economically viable business models.

It responds to a well-documented challenge for sustainability-oriented start-ups: green business models often carry higher innovation risk and face particular difficulties in financing and market entry. The programme addresses this gap by combining financial support with professional guidance, enabling founders to work full-time on their venture during a critical early phase.

Operating within Germany's broader sustainability and innovation policy context, the programme integrates funded start-ups into the wider DBU network of environmental experts, events and initiatives. In doing so, it links entrepreneurial development directly to measurable environmental relief, positioning green start-ups as drivers of a more sustainable and circular economy.

OBJECTIVES

- Support founders in developing environmentally friendly, innovative and economically viable business models.
- Reduce the financing and market-entry barriers faced by sustainability-oriented start-ups.
- Strengthen the environmental relief potential and innovation capacity of green ventures.
- Integrate green start-ups into a national network of environmental experts and stakeholders.
- Contribute to Germany's transition towards a sustainable and circular economy.

TARGET GROUPS

- Entrepreneurs and Founding Teams
- Start-ups (early-stage, sustainability-oriented)
- University Graduates and Researchers developing green ventures
- Young People and Sustainability Professionals

MAIN ACTIVITIES

The programme provides selected green start-ups with a combination of financial and non-material support over a defined funding period. Applications are assessed against four core criteria: environmental relief potential, level of innovation, personal suitability of the founding team, and economic viability.

Funded teams receive a non-repayable grant over a 24-month period, used primarily as a living allowance so that founders can dedicate themselves full-time to building their venture, with additional support for material costs and external services. Alongside the funding, start-ups benefit from professional guidance and supervision by DBU experts, integration into the DBU network, and invitations to DBU events, including activities connected to the German Environmental Award.

Start-ups report on their progress through interim and final reports, providing a structured framework that supports reflection, accountability and continued development. Through this blend of funding, expert mentoring and network access, the programme accompanies founders from an early venture stage towards a market-ready and financially sustainable business.

INNOVATIVE ELEMENTS

A distinctive feature of the DBU Green Start-up Programme is its explicit combination of environmental impact and economic viability as equally weighted selection criteria. Rather than funding technology in isolation, it supports the whole founding team and the sustainability of the business model.

Particularly innovative elements include:

- Dual assessment of environmental relief potential and economic viability.
- Non-material support through expert mentoring and structured progress reporting.
- Integration of individual start-ups into a national sustainability and innovation network.
- A funding model designed to enable full-time entrepreneurial commitment in the early phase.
- A direct link between entrepreneurial support and measurable environmental impact.

RESULTS AND IMPACT

Since its launch, the DBU Green Start-up Programme has funded 94 green start-ups and approved approximately €11.4 million in grants, establishing itself as a recognised pillar of green entrepreneurship

support in Germany. The funded ventures span a wide range of sustainability fields, including circular economy, resource efficiency, energy and environmental technology.

By combining early-stage financing with expert guidance and network integration, the programme has strengthened the innovation and market-entry capacity of sustainability-oriented start-ups and contributed to their environmental impact. Its documented track record and publicly accessible start-up database provide a transparent evidence base of green ventures supported from early idea towards commercial viability.

RELEVANCE FOR GREENEDGE

The DBU Green Start-up Programme provides valuable insights for the development of GREENEDGE learning pathways by demonstrating how green entrepreneurship can be supported in a structured, impact-oriented way. Its four assessment criteria – environmental relief, innovation, personal suitability and economic viability – offer a clear, transferable framework that GREENEDGE could adapt to help learners evaluate the strength and sustainability of their own venture ideas.

The programme's emphasis on combining environmental impact with economic viability aligns closely with GREENEDGE's objectives around sustainable entrepreneurship and its focus on green (GreenComp) and entrepreneurial (EntreComp) competences. Its blend of mentoring, structured reporting and network access provides a real-world model that can inform the design of GREENEDGE's virtual incubator and challenge-based learning activities.

While the programme itself does not use micro-credentials, AI-supported learning or gamification, its criteria-based selection and impact-focused support offer a strong foundation that GREENEDGE can build upon by embedding digital learning pathways, competence-based assessment and market-validation exercises into its educational model.

REFERENCES

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