



Your Online Side Hustle International (YOSHI): Building Entrepreneurial Mindsets through Online Collaborative Learning at Saxion University of Applied Sciences

Saxion University of Applied Sciences (Netherlands), USTP – University of Applied Sciences St. Pölten (Austria), JAMK University of Applied Sciences (Finland)

Abstract

This case study presents *Your Online Side Hustle International (YOSHI)*, an (extra)curricular entrepreneurship programme developed by Saxion University of Applied Sciences in collaboration with its European partners within the [E³UDRES²](#) alliance –USTP – University of Applied Sciences St. Pölten, JAMK University of Applied Sciences. YOSHI supports students in developing online ventures while cultivating entrepreneurial mindsets through experiential, gamified, and intercultural learning. Grounded in the European Entrepreneurship Competence Framework (EntreComp), the 20-week programme combines digital coaching, milestone-based progression, and international collaboration. Overall, YOSHI enhances students' self-efficacy, digital literacy, and opportunity recognition, while strengthening institutional cooperation in entrepreneurship education. This case study showcases the Saxion University of Applied Sciences' experience in coordinating the YOSHI Programme, and it concludes that distributed, practice-oriented learning models such as YOSHI can effectively bridge academic education and real-world innovation across borders.



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HEInnovate dimensions



Table of Contents

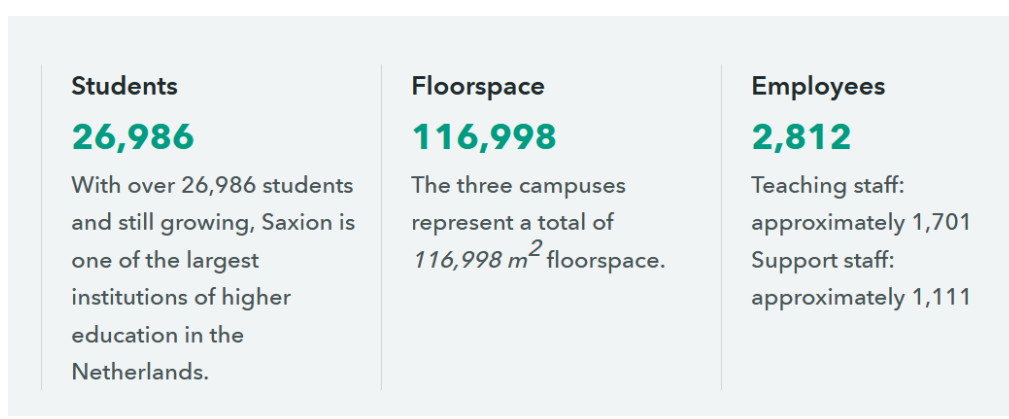
Background and Institutional Context.....	3
Saxion University of Applied Sciences.....	3
Touchpoints with HEInnovate.....	3
Introduction.....	4
YOSHI: Your Online Side Hustle International.....	4
International Collaboration.....	4
Motivation and Rationale.....	5
Student Expectations and Learning Ambitions.....	5
Expectations.....	5
Learning ambitions.....	6
Implementation and Structure of the YOSHI Programme.....	6
Learning Approach.....	6
Structure of the Programme.....	7
Target Groups and Participation.....	8
Key Partners and Stakeholders.....	8
Funding Model.....	9
Outcomes and Impact.....	9
Participation and Completion Rates.....	9
Impact on Learners and Organisational Development.....	9
Success Factors.....	10
Lessons Learned.....	10
Future Outlook and Sustainability.....	11
Contact Details and Resources.....	11
Contact Details.....	11
Resources.....	12

Background and Institutional Context

Saxion University of Applied Sciences

Saxion University of Applied Sciences ([Saxion UAS](#)) is a dynamic higher-education institution in the eastern Netherlands, rooted in a 1998 merger (though tracing its origins back to 1875). Today, it serves students across three campuses in Deventer, Enschede and Apeldoorn. Saxion emphasises applied, practice-oriented education and prides itself on an international campus community, with over 3,500 international students (roughly 14 % of its total) coming from more than 70 nations (see Figure 1. Saxion UAS in Figures). Through its strategic focus on student success, increasing research activity and professional practice, Saxion positions itself as a bridge between higher education and the evolving demands of the regional, national and global labour market.

FIGURE 1. SAXION UAS IN FIGURES



SOURCE: FACTS AND FIGURES, [SAXION WEBSITE](#)

Touchpoints with HEInnovate

Saxion University of Applied Sciences participates in the EIT Higher Education Initiative (EIT HEI) through the [LEAPXR project](#), a two-year programme focused on strengthening innovation and entrepreneurship capacities within applied universities. HEInnovate plays an indirect but important role in Saxion's UAS engagement. The institution has previously used the HEInnovate framework as a diagnostic tool to assess its entrepreneurial maturity, providing an internal benchmark that helped shape its priorities within LEAPXR. These priorities include **professional development for educators**, **strengthening entrepreneurial teaching**, and **building innovation partnerships**. They align closely with the HEInnovate action domains and supported Saxion UAS in demonstrating institutional readiness during the EIT HEI application process.

Introduction

YOSHI: Your Online Side Hustle International

The **Your Online Side Hustle International (YOSHI)** entrepreneurship initiative was developed by the [Saxion Centre for Entrepreneurship](#) at **Saxion University of Applied Sciences** in the Netherlands. It was initially designed as an extracurricular programme and partly, as a result of the Saxion University of Applied Sciences' participation in the E³UDRES² Alliance, YOSHI can now also be offered within the curriculum of specific degree programmes. The programme enables students to explore, test, and develop online business ideas while studying, thereby fostering entrepreneurial thinking and digital skills in a practical setting.

Situated within Saxion's broader strategy ([Strategic Plan 2025-2030](#)) of promoting innovation and regional engagement, the *Centre for Entrepreneurship* acts as a cross-disciplinary hub supporting innovation, coaching, and business development. As a non-faculty service unit, the Centre connects education, research, and practice, collaborating with other institutions and industry partners to stimulate applied entrepreneurship. YOSHI contributes directly to this institutional mission by equipping students with the competences and confidence required to create value in rapidly changing global markets.

International Collaboration

YOSHI has evolved from a local initiative into a truly **international collaboration** under the framework of the [E³UDRES² Alliance](#), which connects several European universities of applied sciences. [USTP – University of Applied Sciences St. Pölten](#) (Austria) and [JAMK University of Applied Sciences](#) (Finland) are two main partners bringing in new subjects in areas of AI, technology, and user centred design into the programme.

This internationalisation has transformed YOSHI into a **shared European learning ecosystem** open to all students and staff of the nine E³UDRES² Partners. The programme integrates *joint coaching sessions*, *guest lectures*, and *peer mentoring* across borders. Participants and coaches engage through the E³UDRES² digital learning platform ([ARENA](#)), and the annual [YOSHI Week](#) in Enschede brings together students and staff from all partner institutions for workshops, networking events, and collaborative challenges. A significant development of the programme is its *further integration into the curricula* and opportunities students obtain by *practicing skills valuable in several other programmes* they follow regardless of whether they study fashion or psychology.

Through these interactions, students are exposed to *diverse perspectives on entrepreneurship, culture, and innovation*, while staff members benefit from *shared expertise and pedagogical exchange*. The partnership reinforces the European dimension

of entrepreneurship education by cultivating intercultural understanding and regional cooperation.

Motivation and Rationale

The YOSHI Programme emerged in response to a **growing number of students** already engaging in an **informal entrepreneurial activity**—selling products online, offering freelance services, or testing creative business ideas—without structured guidance or formal support. The Centre for Entrepreneurship recognised this as an opportunity to design a programme that would allow students to experiment safely, learn collaboratively, and receive targeted coaching at an early stage of entrepreneurial exploration. YOSHI serves as a stepping stone for further development of an entrepreneur, with the help of which, graduates start more mature businesses in following years.

In response, Saxion sought to create a **safe, guided environment** that would allow students to develop, test, and refine their business ideas while benefiting from academic supervision and peer collaboration. The initiative built upon an earlier Dutch-language programme, *Ondernemen als Bijbaan* (“Entrepreneurship as a Side Job”), which focused primarily on e-commerce. YOSHI extended this model to include creative, service-based, and content-driven business ideas, reflecting the expanding diversity of the digital economy.

The programme’s name and language choice were deliberate. “**Side hustle**” was selected as an inclusive and modern term that resonates with students **internationally**, while English was chosen to ensure **accessibility** for Saxion’s multicultural student community. This linguistic and conceptual shift positioned YOSHI as both an educational innovation and an intercultural bridge, providing an entry point for students across Europe to explore entrepreneurship in a collaborative setting.

Student Expectations and Learning Ambitions

Expectations

Participants in the YOSHI Programme approach the experience with varied yet aligned goals combining **personal development** and **entrepreneurial exploration**. Many seek to test the viability of business ideas, refine ongoing ventures, or transform hobbies into income-generating projects. Equally, students anticipate self-growth — challenging themselves, discovering their potential, and assessing their fit for entrepreneurship. The collaborative, intercultural nature of YOSHI further enhances its appeal, providing a platform for peer exchange and expert interaction across Europe (see Figure 2. Word Cloud Summarising Students' Expectations).

FIGURE 2. WORD CLOUD SUMMARISING STUDENTS' EXPECTATIONS



SOURCE: YOSHI COORDINATOR'S FILES

Learning ambitions

Students' learning ambitions centre on developing **practical, transferable entrepreneurial** skills. They aim to strengthen competences in business modelling, digital marketing, branding, e-commerce, and financial literacy, while cultivating creativity, adaptability, and strategic thinking. This reflects a balance between technical proficiency and personal transformation. The programme's experiential learning approach supports participants at all stages – from idea testing to business expansion – ensuring alignment between learner goals and pedagogical design (see Figure 3. Word Cloud Summarising Students' Learning Ambitions).

FIGURE 3. WORD CLOUD SUMMARISING STUDENTS' LEARNING AMBITIONS



SOURCE: YOSHI COORDINATOR'S FILES

Implementation and Structure of the YOSHI Programme

Learning Approach

The programme's pedagogy is grounded in **experiential learning**, combining theory with direct application. Students' progress through twelve structured levels, each introducing a new challenge or concept linked to business creation. They learn through experimentation,

peer feedback, and iterative practice, with assignments requiring tangible evidence of progress such as prototypes and experimentation.

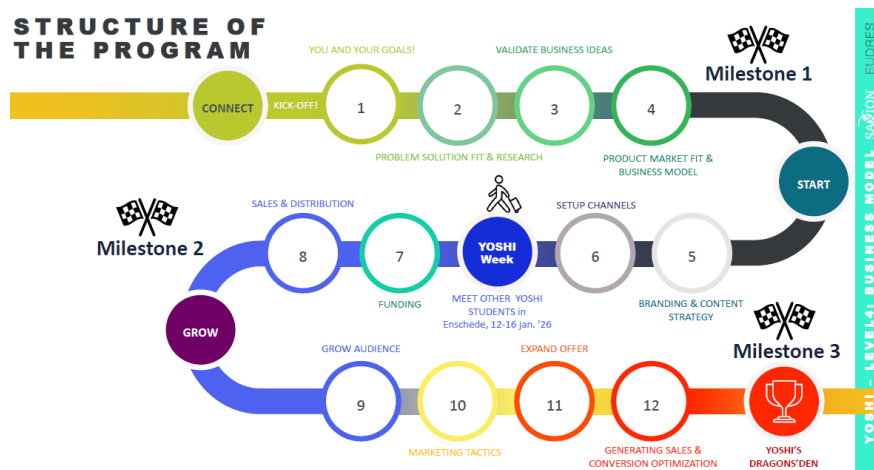
Learning outcomes are mapped to the [European Entrepreneurship Competence Framework \(EntreComp\)](#), focusing on creativity, opportunity recognition, resource mobilisation, and taking initiative. Weekly online lectures and coaching sessions are complemented by interactive guest talks and networking opportunities.

The educational design prioritises flexibility and accessibility—sessions are held outside regular class hours to accommodate participants' academic workloads—while maintaining accountability through continuous mentoring and milestone reviews.

Structure of the Programme

YOSHI is designed as a **20-week learning journey** divided into three sequential phases—**Connect**, **Start**, and **Grow**—each culminating in a milestone that represents a stage of entrepreneurial development (see Figure 4. Structure of the YOSHI Programme).

FIGURE 4. STRUCTURE OF THE YOSHI PROGRAMME



SOURCE: YOSHI COORDINATOR'S FILES

The **Connect Phase (Weeks 1–4)** introduces participants to entrepreneurial thinking and self-reflection. Students explore personal motivations, identify potential niches, and conduct early market validation. The phase culminates in **Milestone 1**, during which participants present validated ideas supported by basic research.

The **Start Phase (Weeks 5–8)** focuses on turning ideas into functioning ventures. Participants work on branding, content strategy, and the development of digital sales channels. They also receive guidance on basic funding approaches. A major event during this phase is **YOSHI Week** – first time in 2026 in Enschede, where participants collaborate internationally and attend practical workshops. **Milestone 2** marks the establishment of an operational online business presence.

The **Grow Phase (Weeks 9–12)** targets expansion, customer acquisition, and long-term sustainability. Students learn strategies for marketing, audience building, and conversion optimisation. The programme concludes with **Milestone 3**, the **YOSHI Dragon's Den**, where selected participants pitch their ventures to a panel of coaches and external experts.

This structured progression mirrors the entrepreneurial lifecycle, offering a gamified learning experience where milestones function as motivational checkpoints and tangible indicators of progress.

Target Groups and Participation

YOSHI welcomes students from **all disciplines and academic years**, reflecting a commitment to inclusivity and interdisciplinarity. Participants come from diverse educational backgrounds such as business, engineering, design, ICT, healthcare, tourism, and fashion and textile studies. Some partner institutions also extend participation to PhD candidates and staff members seeking to test entrepreneurial applications of their research.

This openness results in a vibrant and diverse learning environment where participants with differing skills and cultural perspectives learn from one another. While entry requirements are intentionally minimal to encourage participation, the programme maintains an emphasis on commitment and accountability through regular submissions and coaching sessions.

Key Partners and Stakeholders

The implementation and success of YOSHI depend on the collaboration of several institutional partners within and beyond Saxion University of Applied Sciences. Within Saxion, the **Centre for Entrepreneurship** serves as the coordinating body, supported by a dedicated team of educators and coaches. **Maarten Bas Backer**, the programme's lead, plays a pivotal role in managing operations, liaising with partners, and ensuring strategic alignment.

Externally, the programme is co-organised by USTP UAS (Austria), JAMK UAS (Finland), as well as occasional contributions from other European institutions of the E³UDRES² alliance. These partnerships facilitate the exchange of expertise, the sharing of teaching resources, and the joint supervision of student projects. In the next edition, JAMK UAS will take over the leading role.

Through these multi-stakeholder connections, YOSHI fosters a distributed model of entrepreneurship education, in which institutional collaboration replaces traditional, centralised programme delivery.

Funding Model

Funding has primarily come from the Centre for Entrepreneurship, with the early versions of the program being lightweight in structure. This year (2025), additional support is provided through BIP (Blended Intensive Programmes) subsidies and Erasmus mobility for the on-site week, enabling greater cross-border collaboration, knowledge exchange, and inspiration—benefits that are already evident, though difficult to quantify.

Outcomes and Impact

Participation and Completion Rates

Participation numbers have been difficult to track in earlier editions of YOSHI, as no formal entry requirements were in place and student commitment was not consistently monitored.

Since 2023, more than 300 students have signed up for the program, with completion rates for the extracurricular version averaging around 20–25%. For the current edition (2025/2026), which now carries ECTS credits, approximately 60 students are actively enrolled, and completion rates are expected to increase. Several students have even chosen to participate in YOSHI two or three times.

YOSHI has consistently received strong student evaluations, and feedback gathered over the years has been used to continuously refine the program. In the current edition, guest speakers—including experts and startup founders from across Europe—further enrich the learning experience.

Impact on Learners and Organisational Development

YOSHI has generated significant outcomes for both participants and partner institutions. For students, the programme provides a structured yet flexible opportunity to **transform ideas into tangible entrepreneurial projects**. Participants report increased self-confidence, enhanced digital skills, and a deeper understanding of business creation. Several students have developed fully operational ventures, including:

- a **psychology graduate** who designed a therapeutic card game now commercialised for professional practice.
- a **construction student** who founded an online platform promoting sustainable wooden architecture.
- a **PhD candidate** developing a research-based nutrition supplement and accompanying app.
- a **tourism student** who established a sustainable travel content platform targeting eco-conscious audiences, and many more.

Institutionally, YOSHI strengthens Saxion's profile within the E³UDRES² network, contributing to the internationalisation of entrepreneurship education and reinforcing its applied,

student-centred teaching model. Despite a relatively high attrition rate (approximately 75%), even partial participation exposes students to entrepreneurial methods and networks, demonstrating the programme's broad developmental impact. It has also been proven that students who were thought to have dropped out came back months later with a business they started during and with the help of the YOSHI Programme.

Success Factors

Several key elements underpin the success of YOSHI. The **gamified structure**—dividing learning into levels—creates an accessible and engaging learning experience that lowers psychological barriers to entrepreneurship. The programme's **practical orientation**, which emphasises "learning by doing," resonates strongly with students who might otherwise find entrepreneurship abstract or intimidating.

Moreover, the **international character** of the programme fosters cross-cultural exchange and introduces students to alternative entrepreneurial mindsets. Collaboration with partner institutions and international students from all around the globe including Asia, Africa, and the United States of America allows for a dynamic conversation exchange, shared expertise and resource efficiency.

The integration of coaching and peer interaction offers continuous support, fostering a safe space for experimentation and constructive feedback. In addition, the absence of upfront entry requirements makes YOSHI accessible to anyone.

Lessons Learned

The implementation of YOSHI has generated valuable lessons for future entrepreneurship education initiatives. First, **student activation remains a critical challenge**. Even motivated participants often need continuous encouragement to translate ideas into concrete action. Innovative engagement strategies—such as **peer accountability mechanisms and intermediate milestones**—have proven effective in maintaining momentum.

Second, **online education**, while inclusive and flexible, **limits the spontaneity and energy of in-person interaction**. **Hybrid models** combining digital learning with face-to-face engagement, such as the **YOSHI Week**, appear to offer the most effective balance.

Finally, **sustainability in multi-institutional projects requires ongoing commitment** from all partners. The experience of YOSHI demonstrates that long-term success depends on **formal agreements, resource allocation, and a shared sense of ownership** among the participating institutions.

Future Outlook and Sustainability

Looking ahead, the YOSHI programme aims to strengthen its sustainability through deeper integration into the E³UDRES² alliance structure. Plans include rotating leadership among partner institutions (JAMK UAS in the lead of the next academic year), further developing the shared online learning platform, and introducing alumni mentorship components to maintain continuity and community engagement.

There is also interest in embedding YOSHI's methodology within other educational offerings at Saxion, such as the Minor in Startup Entrepreneurship or postgraduate programmes in healthcare innovation. Expansion to additional partner universities is under consideration, reinforcing YOSHI's ambition to become a scalable model of European entrepreneurship education.

Contact Details and Resources

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Resources

- [ARENA – Digital Learning Platform](#)
- [E³UDRES² Alliance](#)
- [European Entrepreneurship Competence Framework \(EntreComp\)](#)
- [JAMK University of Applied Sciences, Finland](#)
- [LEAPXR Project](#)
- [Saxion University of Applied Sciences](#)
- [Saxion Centre for Entrepreneurship](#)
- [Saxion UAS Strategic Plan 2025-2030](#)
- [USTP – University of Applied Sciences St. Pölten, Austria](#)