

# National Piloting Experience Report

« Bulgaria »

Authoring partner: CATRO  
Bulgaria



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## Introduction

- 🌐 **Background:** *A brief summary of the context for your pilots (in relation to Digital Data and Artificial Intelligence competences in the context of SMEs/VET providers in your country)*

As part of the SMERALD project activities, CATRO Bulgaria conducted two pilot workshops aimed at strengthening digital, data, and AI-related competences among SME staff and management. The first pilot, held in April, was conducted internally with CATRO's own employees and managers, offering a controlled environment to test and refine the training approach. The second pilot, organized in June, targeted external participants – employees and managers from various companies, including SMEs from different sectors.

These pilot sessions were developed in direct response to the growing need among small and medium-sized enterprises to understand and leverage emerging technologies such as artificial intelligence. As digital transformation accelerates, SMEs often face the challenge of limited resources and internal expertise. The pilots aimed to address this gap by providing practical, accessible, and context-relevant training on AI and its potential business applications.

- 🌐 **The Purpose and Objectives of the Pilots:** *why you did it – the reasons for piloting and what you set out to test*

The main purpose of the pilot workshops was to explore how SME staff and management can practically engage with AI technologies, and to test a scalable training model that supports their digital upskilling in an accessible and relevant manner.

More specifically, the pilot sessions aimed to:

- Raise awareness about the fundamentals of Artificial Intelligence (AI) and its relevance for small and medium-sized businesses;
- Introduce the concept of generative AI and large language models (LLMs) in a way that is understandable to non-technical audiences;
- Demonstrate real-life AI tools that can support business operations, communication, and content creation;
- Build participants' confidence in experimenting with AI tools through structured activities and guided exploration;

- Encourage critical thinking about the opportunities and limitations of using AI in the workplace;
- Collect feedback on the training content and format to inform future improvements and broader implementation within the SMERALD framework.

The pilots served both as a learning opportunity for participants and as a testing ground for validating the structure, methodology, and relevance of the AI-related training content developed within the SMERALD project.

🌐 **The Target Groups: Pilot Participants and Beneficiaries:** *who was involved in the piloting - information about them: how many, their occupation, gender, age range, SMEs managers/employees or VET professionals etc)*

The general target group of both pilots were SME managers and employees.

The first pilot targeted one manager and four employees of CATRO Bulgaria, which is a micro enterprise. They were all women, working as HR consultants and trainers, specializing in different business services (all related to career consulting & training).

The second pilot targeted employees of SMEs but also bigger companies belonging to the clients database of CATRO. Apart from the three trainers from CATRO (who attended the CPD in Palermo), six ladies from different companies joined the online workshop among 22 people who registered beforehand. We had an HR manager, a global programme manager, a business partner, managing director, HR senior expert and a freelance trainer & career psychologist.

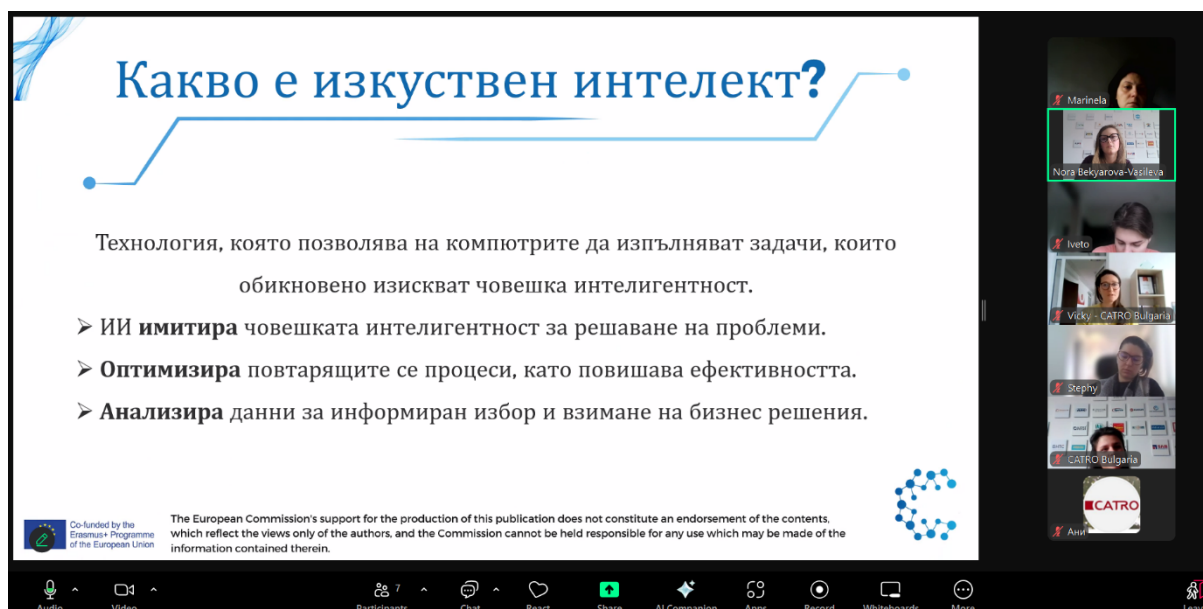
## Section 1: Methodology of the pilot(s)

*Describe how the piloting was carried out, what the format was and what activities it involved. How many pilots did you organise and why did you do it this way?*

We decided to organize two waves of pilots – one internal for CATRO, since the topic is quite relevant for our company too and we do fit the target profile, being an SME ourselves; and one external pilot for big and small companies from our contact database. The interest was quite high, as we even had to close the registration form early, since we were aiming at a small-format event of up to 10 people but we ended up with 22 registered participants and counting (we even had people asking for a recording of the webinar due to inability to register/join). In the end only 6 people joined the webinar, which was actually better, since it was designed for a smaller group.

### Pilot 1

- Description of the pilot ie. **why, where, when** (the timeline), **by whom** (the facilitator/s), **to whom** (the beneficiaries) and numbers involved
- Process/ methods used ie **how** it was conducted and **what** did you do? (eg learning projects (no.), face-to-face sessions, cascading the learning through the full blended learning course etc?)




The internal pilot was organized in the form of a hybrid workshop, where we had 3 people joining F2F and 4 people joining online. The workshop was conducted on April 2<sup>nd</sup> 2025 in Zoom and was facilitated by Victoria & Nora (the 2 CATRO employees who also attended the SMERALD CPD in Palermo). At CATRO we have the practice of organizing knowledge sharing sessions for the whole team once an

employee takes part in an interesting course or workshop on topics, which are relevant for the whole company. Such a topic is the use of AI tools, so we prepared a detailed presentation based on the exercises and materials on the SMERALD platform as well as the resources received during the CPD last December. This was practically our learning project. The workshop lasted for 2 hours and followed this agenda:

1. Introduction to AI and LLMs
2. Popular AI tools and what can we use them for
3. The skill of prompt engineering
4. Practical activity in pairs

The practical activity was inspired by an exercise from the platform but developed further and adjusted to our needs. We also offered some useful resources for further reading that were shared during the CPD.



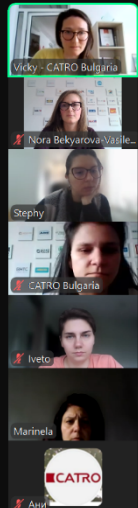
## Further reading

- SMERald learning platform: <https://smerald.blinc-eu.org/>
- [How Large Language Models work](#) @medium.com by Andreas Stöffelbauer, Oct 2023
- [Generative AI exists because of the transformer](#) @Financial Times by Visual Storytelling Team and Madhumita Murgia, Sep 2023
- [Top 12 Prompting Techniques: Benefits and Use Cases](#) @blog.typingmind.com, Aug 2024
- **Още нещо полезно:**
- Website for AI tools: <https://theresanaiforthat.com/>
- **И бонус - нещо любопитно по отношение на визуализирането на данни по креативен начин:**
- [Wedding Data Viz: How We Designed for Feelings](#) @medium.com by Amy Cesal and Zander Furnas, May 2019
- Dear Data project by Giorgia Lupi and Stefanie Posavec: <https://www.dear-data.com/theproject>
- Colombian designer Jose Duarte on Flickr: <https://www.flickr.com/photos/joseduarteq/>

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Audio
Video
Participants
Chat
React
Share
AI Companion
Apps
Record
Whiteboards
More
Leave



## Micro-Credentials in Pilot 1

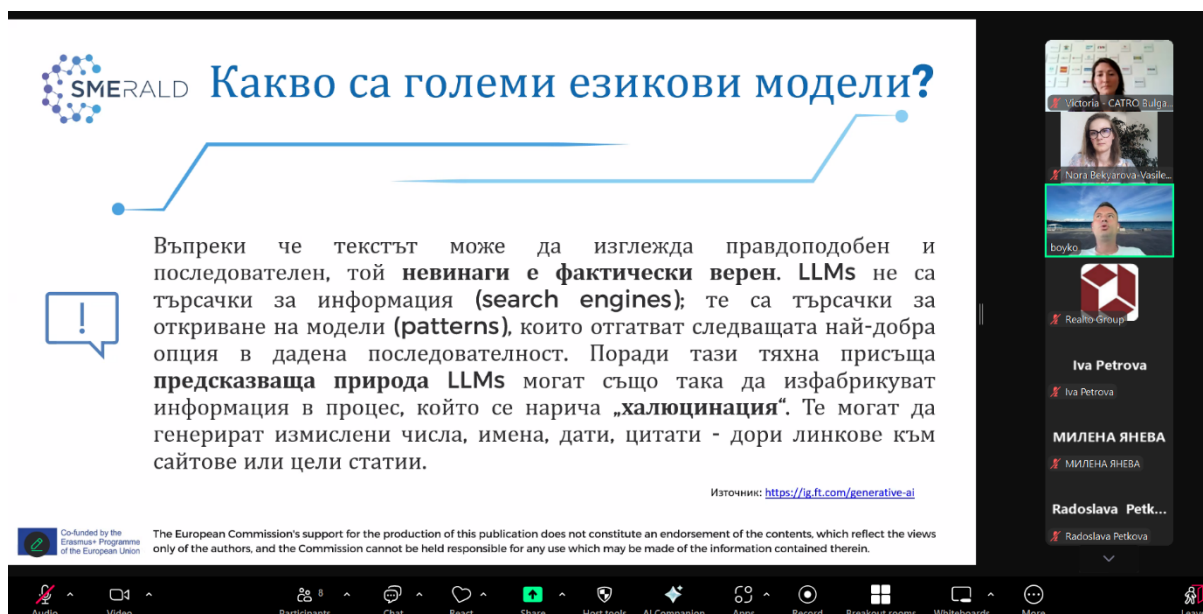
*How were participants evaluated and guided through Micro-Credentials? Explain how learners were evaluated with technologies such as Competence Spider and LEVEL5. What strategies were implemented to monitor progress and validate competencies? How does tailoring the learning experience and dividing the course into micro-modules affect learners' progress and engagement?*

*How did breaking down the entire course into micro-modules and tailoring teaching to individual requirements affect the overall learning experience?*

Since the guidelines on the micro-credentials were introduced after we had implemented our first pilot, we did not really follow this approach closely. What we did was asking the participants to evaluate their competences using the Competence spider BEFORE our workshop, then check out and test the platform and evaluate their competences AFTER participating in the workshop. The results of those who did so are available [on Sharepoint](#).

## Pilot 2

- Description of the pilot ie. **why, where, when** (the timeline), **by whom** (the facilitator/s), **to whom** (the beneficiaries) and numbers involved
- Process/ methods used ie **how** it was conducted and **what** did you do? (eg learning projects (no.), face-to-face sessions, cascading the learning through the full blended learning course etc?)



**Какво са големи езикови модели?**

Въпреки че текстът може да изглежда правдоподобен и последователен, той **невинаги е фактически верен**. LLMs не са търсачки за информация (search engines); те са търсачки за откриване на модели (patterns), които отгатват следващата най-добра опция в дадена последователност. Поради тази тяхна присъща **предсказваща природа** LLMs могат също така да изфабрикуват информация в процес, който се нарича „**халюцинация**“. Те могат да генерират измислени числа, имена, дати, цитати - дори линкове към сайтове или цели статии.

Източник: <https://ig.ft.com/generative-ai>

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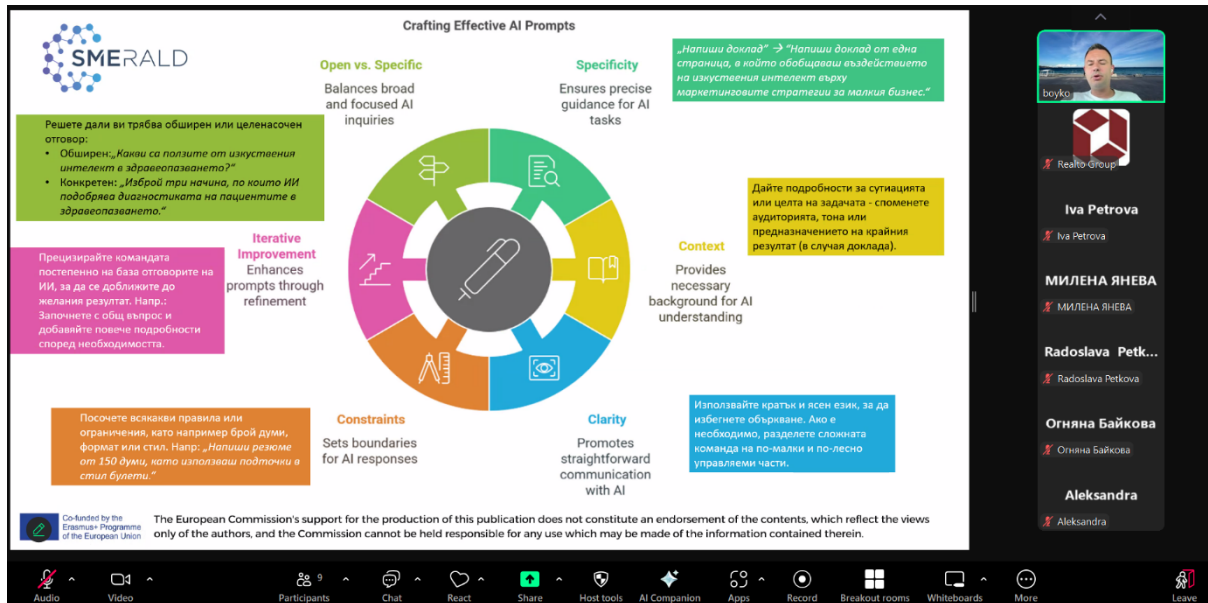
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Participants: Victoria & CATRO Bulgaria, Nora Bekarova-Vasileva, boyko, Iva Petrova, МИЛЕНА ЯНЕВА, Radoslava Petkova

The external pilot was organized in the form of an online workshop, which took place on June 12<sup>th</sup> 2025 in Zoom. It lasted for 2 hours and was facilitated mainly by Boyko (who was the third participant on behalf of CATRO in the CPD in Palermo) – this was his learning project. He was closely supported by Victoria & Nora – the two of us facilitated the group exercise, which was implemented in 2 groups in break-out rooms. The three of us had several preparation meetings before the workshop to develop our programme:

1. Short introduction of the SMERALD project, platform and aim of the workshop
2. Introduction to AI and LLMs
3. ChatGPT and the art of prompt engineering
4. Practical case study based exercise – group work

## 5. Other popular AI tools and what can we use them for



**Crafting Effective AI Prompts**

**Open vs. Specific**  
Balances broad and focused AI inquiries

**Specificity**  
Ensures precise guidance for AI tasks

**Context**  
Provides necessary background for AI understanding

**Clarity**  
Promotes straightforward communication with AI

**Constraints**  
Sets boundaries for AI responses

**Iterative Improvement**  
Enhances prompts through refinement

Решете дали ви трябва обширен или целенасочен отговор:  
• Обширен: „Какви са ползите от изкуствения интелект в здравеопазването?“  
• Конкретен: „Избери три начина, по които ИИ подобрява диагностиката на пациентите в здравеопазването.“

„Напиши доклад“ → „Напиши доклад от една страница, в който обобщаваш въздействието на изкуствения интелект върху маркетинговите стратегии за малкия бизнес.“

Дайте подробности за ситуацията или целта на задачата - споменете аудиторията, тона или предназначението на крайния резултат (в случая доклада).

Използвайте кратки и ясни езици, за да избегнете объркване. Ако е необходимо, разделете сложната команда на по-малки и по-лесно управляеми части.

Посочете всякакви правила или ограничения, като например брой думи, формат или стил. Напр.: „Напиши резюме от 150 думи, като използваш подточки в стил Булет.“

Прецизирате командата постепенно на база отговорите на ИИ, за да се доближите до желания резултат. Напр.: Започнете с общ въпрос и добавяйте повече подробности според необходимостта.

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Participants: boyko, Realto Group, Iva Petrova, МИЛЕНА ЯНЕВА, Radoslava Petk..., Огняна Байкова, Aleksandra

Audio, Video, Participants, Chat, React, Share, Host tools, AI Companion, Apps, Record, Breakout rooms, Whiteboards, More, Leave

We created an informative presentation, which was used as a reference for learners to look at after the workshop, as during the actual webinar we wanted to focus mainly on exchange and practical discussions. We received many questions and participants were very active during the exercise using ChatGPT (for some of them it was the first time working with it). The task was for people to imagine they were working in a company selling printers – in the end of every month they have to analyze the sells but the increasing number of team members and clients makes the data analysis more time consuming. So, the two groups had to complete certain data analysis tasks using ChatGPT and the pre-made data sets provided to them.

### Micro-Credentials in Pilot 2

Participants were encouraged to register on the SMERALD platform and before exploring the content, to try out the competence evaluation tool called Competence Spider. The three facilitators, however, had to complete the LEVEL5 module on the platform. The results are uploaded [on Sharepoint](#) for reference.

## Section 2: Results of the pilot(s)

*Describe the outcomes/results achieved (quantitative and qualitative)*

### 2.1 Pilot 1 – Internal workshop for CATRO employees

*Achievements and successes*

- **Successful internal capacity-building:** The internal pilot not only tested the training content but also boosted internal expertise within CATRO, with the team actively transferring knowledge gained from the CPD training in Palermo (but also the whole project implementation so far). The hybrid format also allowed broader team participation.
- **Ideas exchange:** The practical task was related to an event the company is planning, so we were able to structurally think within the team how we can use certain AI tools in the preparation of this event, particularly in its marketing.

*Challenges*

- **Time constraints:** With only 2 hours available, content had to be streamlined, and some topics (like deeper ethical considerations, or testing more tools live) could not be fully explored, despite the interest in such discussions being high.
- **Due to the lack of expertise in data analysis within our team** we were not able to focus on the other SMERALD aspect but rather stuck to the AI one.
- **Another challenge** was the lack of time of CATRO team members to properly explore the platform due to other commitments, so not everyone was able to perform the evaluation through the Competence spider (out of 5 people, only 3 actually did it).

*Identification of any refinements/improvements needed in the SMERALD methodology*

- **Encourage internal learning projects:** The internal pilot at CATRO was highly successful as a team learning activity. The SMERALD methodology could suggest this as a recommended option, encouraging companies to run internal peer-led sessions after CPD participation.

### 2.2 Pilot 2 – workshop for external companies

*Achievements and successes*

- **High level of interest in the topic:** The strong initial response to the workshop (22 registrants) highlights the relevance and timeliness of the SMERALD topic for SME professionals and corporate staff alike.

- **Effective learning transfer and team collaboration:** All three CPD participants (Victoria, Nora, and Boyko) successfully designed and implemented pilot sessions, demonstrating strong ownership of the learning. The peer-supported approach to workshop design enhanced content quality and delivery.
- **Engaged and diverse participant profile:** Despite the smaller number of final attendees of the workshop, the group included senior-level professionals from various sectors, which encouraged high-quality discussions and deeper reflection on AI's business potential.
- **Positive participant engagement:** The interactive elements (the discussions and especially the group exercise in breakout rooms) fostered collaboration and peer learning, making the content more memorable and applicable to participants' real-life work.

### *Challenges*

- **Drop-off between registration and attendance:** Although registration numbers were high, actual attendance in the workshop was lower than expected (6 participants out of 22). This may be attributed to busy work schedules (the workshop took place at 14:00 h), competing priorities, or the voluntary nature of participation. It reflects a broader challenge in engaging SME staff in non-mandatory online training.
- **Group size adaptation:** While the lower number of attendees turned out to be beneficial for maintaining interactivity, it also required real-time flexibility in group facilitation (e.g., adjusting exercises to smaller groups).
- **Limited gender diversity:** Both pilots were attended exclusively by women, which, while not negative, points to the need for broader outreach and communication strategies in future rounds to attract a more balanced participant mix.
- **Time constraints:** With only 2 hours available, content had to be streamlined, and some topics (like deeper ethical considerations, or testing other tools in addition to ChatGPT) could not be fully explored.

### *Refinements needed*

- **Strengthen the (group) activity section:** The group work component was a clear value-added element in our workshop. Providing more ready-to-use case studies or adaptable templates could help trainers deliver this part smoothly even with variable group sizes.
- **Provide optional "deep dive" content:** For participants who are more advanced or curious, additional supplementary materials or video demos (linked from the platform) could help deepen learning post-workshop.

## Section 3: Conclusions

*What key findings/conclusions can you draw from the the piloting process?  
Please identify the highlights with regard to the SMERALD approach.*

The piloting process confirmed the relevance, adaptability, and practical value of the SMERALD approach for supporting SME staff and management in developing foundational competences related to artificial intelligence. Several key conclusions can be drawn based on our piloting experience in Bulgaria:

- **There is strong interest in AI among SME professionals**, even in non-technical roles. The high initial registration numbers and active participation in both pilots demonstrate that the topic resonates deeply with businesses navigating digital transformation.
- **The SMERALD methodology is flexible and scalable**, as shown by its successful application in both workshops we conducted, across hybrid and fully online settings. This makes it suitable for a variety of SME contexts, regardless of company size or digital maturity.
- **Interactive, scenario-based learning works well**. The practical exercises inspired by the SMERALD platform proved highly effective in engaging participants and helping them understand how generative AI tools like ChatGPT can be applied to real-life business tasks.
- **Trainer preparation and peer support are crucial**. The success of both pilots was largely due to the commitment and collaboration among the CPD-trained CATRO team members. This highlights the importance of investing in trainer development and creating a peer-learning environment during and after the CPD phase.
- **Short, well-structured sessions are appreciated but limit topic depth**. While the 2-hour format ensured accessibility and focus, it also meant that some more advanced topics could not be explored in depth. This suggests a potential benefit in offering extended or follow-up sessions for deeper learning (this was also the request from our participants).
- **SMERALD is not only externally impactful but also internally transformative**. The internal pilot at CATRO proved that the approach can be used as a capacity-building tool within the partner organizations themselves, promoting cross-team learning and knowledge sharing.

The pilots in Bulgaria validated the SMERALD approach as a useful and timely framework for introducing AI competences to SME audiences. With some minor refinements based on real-world delivery, it holds strong potential for broader implementation across various business sectors and national contexts.

## Section 4: Recommendations

*Taking into account your conclusions, what needs to be done to improve/adapt the SMERALD methodology and approach.*

Based on the Bulgarian piloting experience and the structure of the SMERALD Learning Platform, several actionable recommendations can be made to improve and adapt the SMERALD methodology for broader and more effective use across SME and VET contexts:

### 1. Enhance guidance for blended and contextual delivery

- The SMERALD methodology is well-suited for flexible and informal learning settings, but future implementation should include clearer facilitation guidelines for blended (online + F2F) formats. Many SMEs prefer short, practical sessions, and piloting in Bulgaria showed that a modular workshop format (e.g., two-hour thematic sessions) works well.
- Trainer toolkits with adaptable session outlines, timing options, and guidance for group exercises would support smoother adaptation of the platform content to different delivery contexts.

### 2. Support trainers with practical use of the SMERALD platform

- While the SMERALD platform provides a strong self-learning environment, its use in facilitated settings requires additional adaptation and preparation. The pilot showed that trainers benefitted from peer support in digesting the content before training others, so introducing structured trainer onboarding, including walkthroughs of key modules (especially AI and Data Analysis), and example lesson flows aligned with the LEVEL5 framework can be useful.

### 3. Provide ready-to-use and customisable group activities

- Interactive elements such as case studies and group exercises were highly valued. However, facilitators had to adapt these manually. The platform could be improved by offering ready-to-use, editable templates for exercises (aligned with the LEVEL5 competences) that trainers can scale up or down depending on group size.
- Include realistic business scenarios that SMEs can relate to – e.g., using AI for recruitment, customer service, or content creation.

### 4. Emphasise real-life application and reflective learning

- The SMERALD methodology is grounded in a competence-based model, which is a major strength. It is recommended that future sessions explicitly include a reflection step at the end of workshops or learning units (e.g., “How

could I apply this in my company tomorrow?”), to anchor new knowledge into practice.

- The LEVEL5 validation tool could be offered as a light-touch self-assessment for learners after each course/module to reinforce awareness of competence development.

## 5. Modularise platform content for short-form learning needs

- In both pilots, time was a constraint. Offering shorter, bite-sized learning paths or “starter tracks” within the platform (e.g., “30-min intro to Prompt Engineering” or “Quick Guide: How SMEs Can Use ChatGPT”) would help attract and retain busy professionals.
- Tagging and filtering content based on user profile (beginner/intermediate/advanced) or business function (HR, marketing, operations) could enhance usability and relevance.

## Section 5: Pilot snapshots

*What is your biggest highlight from the piloting phase? It can be a good practice, interesting case study, positive success story or a touching quote/feedback you received from your learners. It can be in the form of a text or video or photo collage etc. Be creative, so we can use it for a post in the project social media.*

Generally, we received very positive feedback from both piloting workshops and we wish we would have had more time to explore the matter in depth, because the interest was quite high and strong. One thing that stuck with me was a comment we received from one of our participants in the workshop for external companies. She had little to no experience with the use of AI, not even having an account in ChatGPT. She got so hooked during the workshop, being explained to in “human”, non-expert language how she can use generative AI to her benefit, that she shared in the end *“Thank you so much for sharing all these insights with us! I will register right away and now I know that tonight I won’t be scrolling uselessly on my phone, lying on the couch but exploring ChatGPT, so I can train it to work for me.”*.