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Nextfood - Educating the next generation of professionals in the agrifood system

Practice Abstract #20: Innovative Online Learning: A Team Competition

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In the [FoodFactory-4-Us Student Competition Games](#), Master students in food-related programmes develop and present a unique solution to a real-life food industry challenge. Self-organised teams of 3 to 5 students respond to a widely publicised call with a short description of their team and solution. An Advisory Board of academia and industry choose the top 10 teams to participate in the 4-month competition. Team members attend 6 online trainings: a practice presentation, virtual visit, mentoring workshop, soft skills and 2 typical expert topic presentations - but with topics chosen by the students. The competition ends at a Virtual Conference where teams present their solutions and the winner is announced. Industry- and Association-sponsored prizes include cash and a guaranteed presentation slot at an upcoming professional conference.

In 2018, 6 teams (19 students) competed in the Sustainable Aquaculture competition and in 2019, 14 teams (51 students) competed in Sustainable Cereals. An online competition can be an action learning environment. This requires a lot of planning and attention to detail.

We use 2 instructors to run the competition - from preparing the call for applications, to answering student emails, to uploading information to the competition website, to running the online trainings - 2 people are needed. During the online trainings, it is important that facilitators and students are on camera as this strengthens the links between people in distant locations, but also requires a good internet connection.

Instructions on the website and in slides shown during online trainings must be crystal clear, easy to understand and to find. Students go back many times to check exactly what is expected of them, including the evaluation criteria. We included teamwork as part of the evaluation and were careful to explain teamwork expectations and exactly how we measure teamwork. Finally, regular and personal contact with all students is essential for a sense of community.