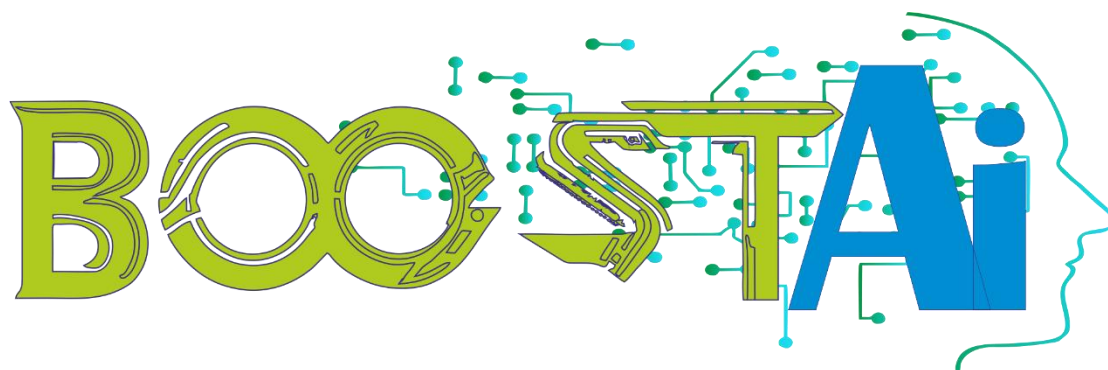




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WP3

Standard Operating Procedure (SOP)

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Introduction

This Standard Operating Procedure (SOP) establishes the formal operational framework governing the implementation and management of the AI-driven Industry 5.0 Incubator at university level. Its purpose is to ensure that all incubator activities are conducted in a consistent, transparent, and effective manner, supporting the development of AI-driven, sustainable innovation while maintaining alignment with institutional objectives and Industry 5.0 principles. The SOP defines clear procedures for participant engagement, challenge management, training delivery, prototype development, and collaboration with SME partners. By formalizing these procedures, the SOP ensures operational continuity, quality assurance, and accountability. It provides operational clarity to all personnel involved in incubator activities and ensures that incubation processes can be implemented consistently across different organizational contexts, including laboratory-level, faculty-level, and university-level placements. Furthermore, the SOP supports replicability by providing a standardized operational model that can be adopted by other institutions.

2. Scope

This SOP applies to all operational, technical, and administrative activities carried out within the incubator. It governs the entire incubation lifecycle, from initial participant intake and challenge collection to prototype validation, evaluation, and dissemination of results. The procedures defined in this document apply to all members of the operational team, incubator participants, mentors, SME partners, and external collaborators involved in incubator activities.

The scope of this SOP includes, but is not limited to, the following operational areas:

- Recruitment and onboarding of participants and SME partners, ensuring transparent and structured selection processes



- Collection, evaluation, and validation of innovation challenges, ensuring alignment with Industry 5.0 and sustainability objectives
- Formation of interdisciplinary teams and assignment of mentors and technical support personnel
- Delivery of training and capacity-building activities to support technical and entrepreneurial skill development
- Implementation of AI-supported ideation, design, and prototype development processes
- Validation of developed solutions with SME partners to ensure practical applicability
- Evaluation, documentation, and reporting of project outcomes and incubator performance
- Dissemination of results and promotion of developed solutions within the academic and industrial ecosystem

This SOP applies to all incubator personnel, participants, and external collaborators involved in the implementation, supervision, or support of incubator activities. Compliance with these procedures is mandatory to ensure consistency, operational efficiency, and quality assurance across all incubation cycles. The SOP provides a structured and traceable framework that supports effective coordination, transparent decision-making, and proper documentation of activities and outcomes. It also ensures that incubator operations remain aligned with institutional policies, project requirements, and ethical standards, while enabling continuous improvement, replicability, and long-term sustainability of the incubator within the university ecosystem.

3. Definitions

Term	Definition
Incubator Manager	The Incubator Manager is responsible for the overall operational coordination and management of the incubator. This includes planning activities, supervising implementation, managing stakeholder relationships, and ensuring compliance with operational procedures. The Incubator Manager serves as the primary point of contact for participants, institutional representatives, and external partners.
AI Specialist	The AI Specialist provides technical expertise and guidance related to artificial intelligence



	methodologies, tools, and implementation. This role supports participants during solution development, assists in prototype implementation, and ensures that technical approaches are feasible and appropriate.
Industry 5.0 and Sustainability Expert	This role ensures that incubator activities align with sustainability principles and Industry 5.0 objectives. The expert supports participants in integrating environmentally responsible practices and evaluating the broader impact of their solutions.
SME Partner	An SME Partner is an external organization collaborating with the incubator by providing innovation challenges, technical input, and validation support. SME partners contribute practical expertise and may participate in project evaluation and implementation phases.
Participant	Participants include students, researchers, academic staff, or other authorized individuals actively engaged in incubator activities, including training, project development, and prototype validation.

4. Responsibilities

The effective functioning of the incubator depends on the clear definition and assignment of responsibilities among the members of the governance and operational structure. Each role contributes to ensuring that incubator activities are implemented efficiently, that participants receive appropriate support, and that projects progress according to established procedures. Responsibilities are distributed across managerial, technical, educational, and administrative functions, ensuring both strategic oversight and operational continuity. All personnel involved in incubator activities are expected to perform their duties in accordance with this SOP, institutional policies, and applicable ethical and legal requirements. Coordination between roles is essential, as incubator activities require continuous interaction between participants, technical experts, and external stakeholders.



4.1 Incubator Manager

The Incubator Manager is responsible for the overall coordination and supervision of incubator operations. This role ensures that all operational activities are implemented according to the established methodology, timelines, and institutional requirements. The Incubator Manager acts as the primary coordination point between participants, SME partners, academic mentors, and institutional representatives. In practical terms, this role includes planning and organizing incubation cycles, ensuring that calls for participation are properly disseminated, and overseeing the intake and onboarding of participants. The Incubator Manager also supervises project progression, ensuring that teams receive appropriate guidance and that project milestones are respected. Where challenges arise, the Incubator Manager facilitates problem resolution and ensures continuity of operations. The Incubator Manager is also responsible for administrative and reporting functions. This includes maintaining operational records, monitoring performance indicators, preparing internal reports, and ensuring compliance with project and institutional requirements. This role contributes directly to the sustainability and long-term integration of the incubator within the university structure.

Key responsibilities include:

- Coordinating all operational activities of the incubator
- Managing communication with participants, SME partners, and institutional stakeholders
- Supervising implementation of incubation cycles and ensuring adherence to timelines
- Monitoring project progress and ensuring milestone completion
- Maintaining operational documentation and reporting records
- Supporting strategic development and sustainability of the incubator

4.2 AI Specialist / Technical Support

The AI Specialist provides technical guidance and support to incubator participants throughout the development of their solutions. This role ensures that participants are able to apply appropriate AI tools and methodologies, even when they have limited prior technical experience. The AI Specialist contributes directly to ensuring the technical feasibility and quality of incubator projects. This support may include assisting participants in selecting appropriate development tools, providing guidance on data handling and model implementation, and supporting the testing and validation of technical components. The AI Specialist may also



contribute to training activities, helping participants develop practical technical skills that can be applied within their projects.

Key responsibilities include:

- Providing technical guidance on AI tools, methodologies, and implementation
- Supporting participants in prototype development and testing
- Assisting in data analysis, model development, and technical problem solving
- Contributing to technical training and mentoring activities
- Ensuring technical feasibility and quality of developed solutions

4.3 Industry 5.0 and Sustainability Expert

The Industry 5.0 and Sustainability Expert ensures that incubator activities remain aligned with sustainability objectives and responsible innovation principles. This role supports participants in integrating environmental and societal considerations into the design and development of their solutions. Participants are encouraged to evaluate the broader impact of their projects, including potential contributions to resource efficiency, environmental protection, or sustainable industrial practices. The Sustainability Expert provides guidance on these aspects and helps ensure that developed solutions contribute positively to sustainability objectives. This role also contributes to ensuring that incubator activities align with Industry 5.0 principles, including human-centered innovation, ethical technology use, and long-term societal benefit.

Key responsibilities include:

- Advising participants on sustainability and Industry 5.0 principles
- Supporting evaluation of environmental and societal impact
- Promoting responsible and ethical innovation practices
- Contributing to sustainability-related training activities

4.4 Training Coordinator

The Training Coordinator is responsible for planning, organizing, and implementing training and capacity-building activities within the incubator. This role ensures that participants acquire the knowledge and competencies necessary to successfully develop their projects.



This role also contributes to ensuring training quality and relevance by coordinating internal and external trainers and monitoring participant engagement.

Key responsibilities include:

- Planning and organizing training sessions, workshops, and seminars
- Coordinating trainers, mentors, and guest speakers
- Ensuring alignment between training activities and project needs
- Monitoring training participation and effectiveness

4.5 Administrative Support

Administrative support includes managing schedules, maintaining participant records, organizing meetings, and supporting communication between stakeholders. Proper documentation and record management are essential for ensuring accountability and enabling future reporting and evaluation.

Key responsibilities include:

- Managing operational documentation and participant records
- Coordinating meetings, training sessions, and events
- Supporting communication with participants and stakeholders
- Assisting with reporting and administrative procedures

4.6 SME Partners and Mentors

SME partners and mentors play a critical role in ensuring the practical relevance of incubator projects. SME partners provide real-world challenges and contribute feedback throughout the development process, helping ensure that solutions address actual industrial needs. Mentors provide guidance, technical advice, and methodological support to participants. Their involvement helps participants navigate technical and conceptual challenges and improves the quality of developed solutions. Their participation strengthens the connection between academic learning and real-world application.

Key responsibilities include:

- Providing practical input and feedback during project development
- Supporting validation and evaluation of developed prototypes
- Contributing to mentoring and knowledge exchange



5 Intake and Onboarding

The intake and onboarding phase establishes the operational foundation for each incubation cycle by ensuring the structured recruitment, selection, and integration of participants and SME partners. This phase ensures that all participants meet the eligibility requirements, understand their roles and responsibilities, and are properly integrated into the incubator workflow. A structured onboarding process is essential to ensure operational efficiency, participant preparedness, and alignment between project objectives and stakeholder expectations. The intake process begins with the formal announcement of open calls targeting students, researchers, academic staff, and SME partners. These calls are disseminated through institutional communication channels, including university websites, mailing lists, innovation platforms, and partner networks. The call documentation clearly specifies eligibility criteria, expected participant commitment, selection procedures, timelines, and anticipated project scope. This ensures transparency and equal access to incubator opportunities.

Applications are collected using standardized submission forms to ensure consistency and completeness of information. Participant applications typically include academic background, technical and interdisciplinary competencies, motivation for participation, and areas of interest related to artificial intelligence, sustainability, or entrepreneurship. SME partners submit challenge proposals describing the problem context, operational environment, expected outcomes, and potential impact. This structured submission process allows the operational team to evaluate applications efficiently and objectively. The operational team reviews all submitted applications and challenge proposals. Selection decisions are based on predefined criteria, including technical relevance, feasibility, participant motivation, alignment with incubator objectives, and availability of technical and mentoring resources. Where necessary, clarification meetings or interviews may be conducted to ensure proper understanding of proposed challenges and participant capabilities. Following selection, participants and SME partners undergo a formal onboarding process. This includes:

- Communication of selection results and formal confirmation of participation
- Provision of incubator guidelines, operational procedures, and timelines
- Introduction to incubator objectives, workflow, and expectations
- Assignment of preliminary roles and identification of project interests

This onboarding phase ensures that all participants are fully informed and prepared to begin incubation activities. It also establishes clear communication



channels between participants, the operational team, and SME partners. All onboarding documentation, including applications, selection records, and onboarding confirmations, is archived by the operational team in accordance with record management procedures. This ensures traceability, accountability, and compliance with institutional and project requirements.

6 Challenge Collection & Validation

Activity	Responsible Actor(s)	Description	Inputs	Outputs
Challenge Identification	Incubator Manager, SME Partners, Academic Staff	Innovation challenges are identified through direct engagement with SME partners, academic research activities, sustainability assessments, or internal innovation proposals. This step ensures that challenges reflect real industrial, technological, or environmental needs aligned with Industry 5.0 principles.	SME needs, research results, sectoral reports, internal proposals	Initial list of potential challenges
Challenge Submission	SME Partners, Academic Staff	SME partners or internal stakeholders submit challenges using a standardized challenge submission template. The submission must include problem description, operational context, expected outcomes, and any relevant technical or sustainability considerations.	Completed challenge submission template	Formalized challenge proposals
Administrative Review	Incubator Manager, Administrative Staff	Submitted challenges are reviewed to ensure completeness, clarity, and alignment with incubator objectives.	Challenge submission forms	Validated submissions ready for technical review



		Incomplete submissions may be returned to the submitting party for clarification or revision.		
Technical and Strategic Evaluation	Incubator Manager, AI Specialist, Sustainability Expert	Challenges are evaluated to assess technical feasibility, relevance to AI applications, sustainability impact, and alignment with incubator scope. Resource availability and incubation capacity are also considered.	Validated challenge submissions	Approved and prioritized challenge list
Challenge Approval	Steering Committee or Operational Team (as applicable)	Approved challenges are formally accepted for inclusion in the incubation cycle. This decision ensures that only feasible and relevant challenges are assigned to participant teams.	Evaluated challenge list	Official challenge portfolio
Challenge Preparation	Operational Team	Approved challenges are refined and documented in a standardized format suitable for participant assignment. This includes clarifying objectives, expected deliverables, and available support resources.	Approved challenges	Prepared challenge briefs
Challenge Assignment to Teams	Incubator Manager, Operational Team	Challenges are assigned to interdisciplinary participant teams based on skill alignment, participant interest, and project feasibility. This ensures effective project	Prepared challenge briefs, participant profiles	Assigned team-challenge matches



		execution and learning outcomes.		
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6. Required Documents & Templates

Proper documentation is essential to ensure traceability, accountability, and quality assurance throughout the incubation process. The use of standardized templates ensures consistency in data collection, project monitoring, and evaluation, while also facilitating reporting and future replication of the incubator model. All operational activities must be supported by appropriate documentation, which serves as both a management tool and a record of incubator performance and outcomes. The operational team is responsible for maintaining and updating all required documentation. Templates must be provided to participants and SME partners at appropriate stages of the incubation process. These documents ensure that project activities are properly recorded, that progress can be monitored effectively, and that outcomes can be evaluated objectively. The following documents and templates are required for the implementation of each incubation cycle:

Participant Application Form

This form is used to collect relevant information about applicants, including academic background, technical skills, areas of interest, and motivation for participation. It allows the operational team to assess participant suitability and ensure balanced team composition.

SME Challenge Submission Form

This template is used by SME partners to formally submit innovation challenges. It includes a detailed description of the problem, operational context, expected outcomes, and relevant technical or sustainability considerations. This ensures that challenges are clearly defined and suitable for incubation.

Mentor Assignment Sheet

This document records the assignment of mentors and technical support personnel to specific teams. It ensures that each team has access to appropriate technical and methodological guidance throughout the incubation process.

Training Attendance Sheet



This document records participation in training sessions, workshops, and mentoring activities. It provides evidence of participant engagement and supports evaluation of training effectiveness.

Prototyping Progress Report

Teams use this template to document the development of their solutions, including technical approaches, implementation progress, challenges encountered, and adjustments made. This document supports monitoring and evaluation of project progression.

Final Evaluation Rubric

This template is used by evaluators to assess developed solutions based on predefined criteria, such as technical feasibility, innovation potential, sustainability impact, and applicability. It ensures consistent and transparent evaluation.

SME Feedback Form

SME partners use this document to provide structured feedback on developed prototypes. This feedback is essential for validating solution relevance and identifying potential improvements.

7. Records Management

Effective records management ensures transparency, accountability, and traceability of all incubator activities. All operational, technical, and administrative documentation must be properly recorded, securely stored, and accessible to authorized personnel. This ensures that incubator activities can be monitored, evaluated, and audited when necessary.

All incubator-related documents must be stored in a centralized digital repository managed by the operational team. This repository may be hosted on institutional servers, secure cloud platforms, or other authorized storage systems. Access to these records must be restricted to authorized personnel, including the Incubator Manager, operational team members, and designated institutional representatives.

The following principles must be followed:



- All participant applications, challenge submissions, and evaluation records must be retained
- All training attendance records and mentoring documentation must be archived
- All prototype development documentation and validation reports must be stored
- All evaluation and reporting documentation must be preserved

Records must be retained for a minimum period of three (3) years following the completion of the incubation cycle, unless institutional or project-specific requirements specify a longer retention period.

Proper record management supports:

- Monitoring and evaluation of incubator performance
- Reporting to institutional and project stakeholders
- Replication of the incubator model
- Continuous improvement of operational procedures

Data protection and confidentiality requirements must be respected at all times.

8. Quality Assurance

Quality assurance ensures that incubator activities are implemented effectively and continuously improved over time. This aspect is normally based on the in place existing QA procedures and regulations within the unit the Incubator is organised. However, if the incubator is established as a new, independent Unit within the University, a QA assurance strategy, plans, procedures, etc. are required to be implemented. This includes monitoring performance, collecting feedback from participants and stakeholders, and periodically reviewing operational procedures.

Quality assurance activities are coordinated by the Incubator Manager, with support from the operational team and, where applicable, institutional oversight bodies. The objective is to ensure that incubator activities remain aligned with operational standards, project objectives, and institutional requirements.

Key quality assurance mechanisms include:

Operational Monitoring



The operational team continuously monitors incubator activities, including participant engagement, project progression, and training effectiveness. This ensures that potential issues can be identified and addressed promptly.

Performance Monitoring Using KPIs

Key Performance Indicators (KPIs), as defined in the incubator methodology, are used to evaluate operational effectiveness and project outcomes. These indicators include participation levels, number of developed prototypes, and implementation outcomes.

Periodic Review of Operational Procedures

The SOP and operational procedures are reviewed periodically to ensure their continued relevance and effectiveness. This review may be conducted annually or following the completion of an incubation cycle.

Continuous Improvement Process

Based on monitoring results and stakeholder feedback, operational procedures may be updated to improve efficiency, effectiveness, and alignment with incubator objectives.

These quality assurance mechanisms ensure that the incubator operates effectively and continues to deliver meaningful outcomes.

- Participant application form
- SME challenge submission form
- Mentor assignment sheet
- Training attendance sheet
- Prototyping progress report
- Final evaluation rubric
- Feedback form for SMEs