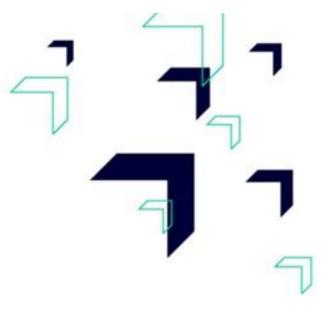




Advisory Service Providers Guidelines

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Contents

1. Introduction	2
2. Registration Requirements for Service Providers	3
2.1 General Requirements	3
2.2 Consultant Qualifications	3
Business Reports for SMEs	3
Marketing Strategy for Micro & Small Enterprises	3
Internationalisation Strategy for SMEs	4
Standards and Awards for SMEs	4
3. Eligible Advisory Services	5
3.1 Business Reports for SMEs	5
3.2 Marketing Strategy for Micro & Small Enterprises	8
3.3 Internationalisation Strategy for SMEs	10
3.4 Standards & Awards for SMEs	12
4. Reimbursement Process	13
5. Compliance and Reporting Obligations	14
Annex I. Application Process	15
Annex II. Declaration of Unrelation Template	16

1. Introduction

These guidelines set out the requirements and obligations for Service Providers registered with the Measures and Support Division (IB) under the Ministry responsible for EU Funds and Programmes. The IB administers ERDF Support Measures under the Operational Programme 2021 – 2027, providing grants for SMEs through various advisory schemes.

Service Providers shall comply with these guidelines to offer consultancy services under the updated Business Enhance Advisory Schemes. These include but are not limited to:

- Business Reports for SMEs
- Marketing Strategy for Micro & Small Enterprises
- Internationalisation Strategy for SMEs
- Standards & Awards for SMEs

These schemes are designed to enhance SME competitiveness, market expansion, and operational efficiency.

The Service Provider shall have in place high reporting standards, project management methodologies and a supporting quality assurance system¹ and shall provide the IB with supporting documentation providing a detailed overview of such methodologies. The Service Provider shall ensure that these methodologies are maintained when providing services to Undertakings being assisted through the respective schemes.

External services shall be procured in line with the eligible actions identified in the respective scheme's Guidance Notes. Such services shall not be of a periodical or continuous nature or in relation to the usual operating costs of the beneficiary, such as routine tax consultancy services, regular legal services or advertising or relating to legal and regulatory obligations arising from the nature of the beneficiary's operations and economic activity.

Advisory services shall only be provided to beneficiary Undertakings external to the registered Service Provider. That is to say, the beneficiary and the Service Provider are to be autonomous and unrelated to each other.

¹ This requirement does not necessitate certified quality standards; however the Service Provider has to have a documented methodology in place that offers assurance through checks and balances that the consultancy services and the emanating output meets specific standards that at least meet the minimum requirements outlined in these guidelines.

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2. Registration Requirements for Service Providers

To be considered for registration, Service Providers must demonstrate competence in providing consultancy services to SMEs across multiple sectors. The requirements are as follows:

2.1 General Requirements

- Service Providers must submit a completed Service Providers Application Form.
- Service Providers already registered with the IB to provide consultancy services, shall be automatically considered as Registered Service Providers under the 'Business Reports for SMEs' aid scheme.
- The Service Provider must be an entity or self-employed consultant with a proven track record in business consultancy.
- The Service Provider must have established high reporting standards, project management methodologies, and quality assurance systems.

2.2 Consultant Qualifications

Each registered Service Provider must appoint at least at least one consultant, being a senior member/employee of the organisation (e.g. partner, or forms part of the senior management team of the organisation) as a lead expert.

Each consultant shall provide and list their competences and expertise including but not limited to analytical and evaluation skills; knowledge and expertise of the national and international economic landscape; and previous consultancy projects undertaken in Malta. These may be supported by any relevant documentation.

Each consultant shall meet the following criteria:

Business Reports for SMEs

Qualifications: A minimum of a master's degree or a comparable recognised qualification at a minimum MQF Level 7 in any one of the following areas: Accounts, Economics, Business Management or being a warranted Accountant or Auditor. A qualification at MQF Level 7 in other areas may be accepted on provision of a full academic record and/or declaration from the Award.

Marketing Strategy for Micro & Small Enterprises

 Qualifications: A minimum of a comparable recognised qualification at MQF Level 6 in any of the following areas: Marketing, Digital Marketing, Communications or Management. A qualification at a minimum MQF Level 6 in other areas may be accepted if accompanied by a Professional Certification in Digital Marketing or Strategic Marketing.

o **Testimonials**: A minimum of 3 testimonials from previous clients of a *Marketing Strategy*.

Internationalisation Strategy for SMEs

- Qualifications: A minimum of a comparable recognised qualification at MQF Level 6 in any of the following areas: International Business, Economics, Strategic Management or Business Administration. A qualification at a minimum MQF Level 6 in other areas may be accepted if accompanied by a Professional Certification in International Trade and Export, Market Analysis and Strategy or Project Management or else with a strong emphasis on economic and market analysis. A qualification at a minimum MQF Level 6 in Law may be accepted if the individual has specialised in International Business Law, Trade and Customs Law, Corporate Law with a focus on cross-border operations or Intellectual Property Law.
- **Testimonials**: A minimum of 3 identifiable testimonials from previous clients of an *Internationalisation Strategy*.

Standards and Awards for SMEs

- o **Membership with Professional Bodies**: Copy of any membership with Professional Bodies
- Testimonials: A minimum of 3 identifiable testimonials from previous clients of said Standard or Award. If a letter of reference from the certification body or award owner is provided than this will be accepted as 1 reference.
- o ISO Standards: Copy of the CQA/IRCA Auditor Certificate
- Other Awards: Relevant Recognition by Awarding Body

3. Eligible Advisory Services

The following advisory services are eligible for support under the respective schemes. On project completion, the registered Service Provider shall provide the assisted Undertaking with an authenticated report, issued in a signed scanned copy (.pdf) which shall include (as its cover page) the signed and dated respective Declaration of Unrelation by the Service Provider, which declarations are available for download from Fondi.EU by clicking here. The declaration shall be signed by both the Authorized Representative and the Consultant. Moreover, the report shall also include a reference in the Executive Summary depending on the scheme as follows:

- The report is being funded under the Business Reports for SMEs part-financed by the European Union.
- The report is being funded under the Marketing Strategy for Micro & Small Enterprises part-financed by the European Union
- The report is being funded under the Internationalisation Strategy for SMEs partfinanced by the European Union.
- The report is being funded under the Standards & Awards for SMEs part-financed by the European Union.

The reports eligible under each scheme are as follow and as a minimum shall include the following sections:

3.1 Business Reports for SMEs

- **Process and Systems Review** aimed at rendering the Undertaking potentially more efficient; or
- **Business Plan** addressing the proposed investment initiatives, aimed at rendering the Undertaking potentially more competitive.

The reports shall include at least the following:

Business Plan

Executive Summary

Business History, Vision & Objectives

Business Environment

PESTEL Analysis (or Similar)

Business Concept

- including Current Products;
- Opportunity Gap;
- New Offering Proposals

Business Model Canvas (or Similar) Including amongst others:

- Core strategy
- Commercial Networks
- · Resources required
- Revenue Streams
- Channels of Distribution

Management and Organisation

• Including Organigram (or similar)

Risk Assessment

- A Simple Risk Register outlining the main Operational
- Financial risks
- Strategic risks
- the respective mitigation measures

Project Feasibility Research

- Market Analysis & Competition;
- Target Market/s;
- Industry's potential;
- Investment required;
- Competitors List
- SWOT Analysis (or similar);
- Expected Outcomes & Impacts

Investment Proposal

- Description of the needed investment
 - Describe the item's function within the operations and, in brief, the need for its purchase.
- Technical specifications for each specific investment
 - These are intended to provide a baseline for comparability. The product/model may well be distinct, but it should nonetheless be possible to have a common denominator when it comes to amounts/size/ capacity/output/material etc. The minimum technical specifications do not necessarily need to be an absolute value (e.g. table with 1.5m in length). It can be a range (e.g. 1.2-1.6m length), or a lower or an upper boundary (e.g table with length of minimum/maximum 1.5m). While not intended to be overly specific, and allowing for some leeway, the applicant nonetheless needs to outline what they are looking for in the item for which aid is being requested.
- Description of what is available on the market

- There may be off-the-shelf solutions, or a completely custom-made solution is required, or a hybrid of the two can fulfil the applicant's needs. Whichever applies, the applicant is to outline which different versions or brands for the item exist on the market at present.
- Identification of which suppliers offer the required investment and the price range- for each investment.
 - o For items which have a broad range of suppliers, it is naturally expected that the market leaders are included within the list of options considered, and that the list of suppliers is sufficiently large accordingly (e.g. one cannot justifiably list just 3 suppliers of laptops, because the local market alone includes many more than 3 suppliers). A price range can be provided for the item itself, rather than by specific supplier. One is to ensure that an explanation is provided in instances where the price range is broad
- From the options considered, those that meet targets and requirements of the applicant should be identified
 - If all the suppliers mentioned in the above section are considered as meeting the applicant's needs, then this is to be explicitly mentioned. If any don't, then a substantive and reasonable justification thereof is to be provided accordingly.
 - Provide brief background information on each of the suppliers identified provided, together with their website URL and/or online link of each.

Financial Plan, Budgets & Supporting Information

- Financial Statements (Profit & Loss Account and Balance Sheet) for the last financial year
- Financial Projections (Profit & Loss, Balance Sheet, Cashflow Projections) for the upcoming 3 years.

Process and Systems Reviews

Executive Summary

Process and Systems Analysis

- Initial Situation
- Define a Clear Digitalisation Strategy

Evaluation

- Establish Work-Based Processes
- Provide Effective Change Management

Findings and Recommendations

• Investing selectively in technology

Sustainable impact of the digitalisation investment

Financial Projections

• including Financial Benefits

Return on Investment (ROI)

3.2 Marketing Strategy for Micro & Small Enterprises

A **Marketing Strategy** outlining how a business will promote its products or services to reach its target audience and achieve its objectives and should provide a comprehensive plan for how a business intends to attract, engage, and retain customers while achieving its business goals.

The report shall include at least the following:

1. Executive Summary

- Brief Overview of the Enterprise
- Purpose of the Marketing Strategy
- Key Objectives and goals

2. Business Overview

- Company description (mission, vision, and values)
- Core products or services offered
- Industry overview and position in the market
- Key business challenges and opportunities

3. Market Analysis

- Target Market: Identification and segmentation of target audience
- Customer Personas: Description of typical customers, including demographics, behaviours, and needs
- Market Trends: Insights into industry trends and customer preferences

4. Marketing Goals and objectives

- Smart, measurable, achievable, relevant and time-bound (SMART) goals (examples: Increase brand awareness by 30% in 12 months)
- Alignment with broader business objectives

5. Positioning and Branding

- **Positioning**: The unique place your product or service will occupy in the minds of consumers relative to competitors.
- Branding: How your brand is perceived, including its values, messaging, visual identity, and tone.
- Value Proposition: The unique benefit your product/service offers that differentiates it from others in the market.

6. Marketing Strategies and Tactics

- Positioning: How the enterprise will differentiate itself in the market
- **Product/Service Offering:** Highlighting unique selling points (USPs)
- Pricing Strategy: Approach to competitive pricing and perceived value

- Promotional Strategy: Tools and platforms to be used, such as:
 - Digital marketing (social media, email marketing, SEO, paid ads)
 - Traditional marketing (print media, events, partnerships)
 - Public relations and branding efforts
- **Distribution Channels:** Physical or digital channels to deliver the product/service

7. Digital and Content Strategy:

- **Website:** How your website will function as a key marketing tool (e.g., ecommerce, lead generation, content hub).
- **SEO:** Search engine optimization strategies to improve organic search visibility.
- Social media: The approach to using social media platforms to engage with customers.
- **Email Marketing:** Strategies for reaching out to customers directly through newsletters or automated campaigns.
- Paid Advertising: Paid campaigns such as Google Ads, Facebook Ads, or display ads.
- **Content Creation**: Developing valuable content (blogs, videos, infographics, etc.) that resonates with the target audience.
- **Content Distribution**: The channels used to distribute the content, including social media, email, websites, and third-party platforms.
- **Content Calendar**: Planning the frequency and timing of content releases to ensure consistency.

8. Financial Overview

- Marketing budget: Allocation across different strategies and activities
- Cost-benefit analysis: Expected ROI from marketing efforts

9. Measurement and Evaluation

- Key Performance Indicators (KPIs):
 - Examples: Website traffic, customer acquisition costs, social media engagement, sales conversion rates
- Tools and methods for tracking performance (e.g., Google Analytics, CRM tools)
- Review and adjustment process

10. Implementation Plan

- Marketing Activities and Timelines:
 - Specific campaigns and initiatives
 - o Detailed schedule with milestones
- Resource Allocation:
 - o Budget breakdown for marketing activities
 - Staff responsibilities and third-party involvement

11. Action Plan for the Upcoming Year

- Key Priorities
 - Outline major focus areas for the year, including new initiatives and strategic shifts.
- Planned Marketing Activities & Responsibilities
 - List specific campaigns, tactics, and assigned responsibilities.
- Timeline, Milestones & Budget

 Provide a structured schedule for implementation, including quarterly or monthly targets as well budget.

12. Risk Management

- Identification of potential risks and challenges
- Mitigation strategies for each identified risk

13. Sustainability and Scalability

- How the marketing strategy supports long-term growth
- Adaptation plans for changing market conditions

14. Appendices

- Supporting documents (e.g., market research data, SWOT analysis, customer surveys)
- Visual aids like charts, graphs, or timelines

3.3 Internationalisation Strategy for SMEs

- Internationalisation Strategy Part 1: Studying Opportunities Abroad
- Internationalisation Strategy Part 2: Market Entry Strategy & Financial Planning

The reports shall include the at least following:

Internationalisation Strategy - Part 1 - Studying Opportunities Abroad

1. Executive Summary

- Brief Overview of the Enterprise
- Purpose of the Internationalisation strategy
- Key Objectives and goals

2. Business Overview

- Company description including:
 - o Products/services offered
 - Unique selling propositions
 - o Current market performance
- Internal readiness assessment (financial, operational and strategy capacity) for internationalisation

3. Research on Global Opportunities

- Market/s identification:
 - Criteria for market/s selection (e.g. economic stability, demand for products/services, ease of entry)
 - Shortlisting of potential markets
- Global Trends:
 - o Industry-specific trends on a global scale
 - Emerging markets or regions with growth potential

4. Comparative Market Analysis

- Market Characteristics:
 - Size, growth rate, and demand for products/services.
 - o Regulatory environment and trade barriers.
- Competitor Analysis:
 - o Key players in shortlisted markets.

o SWOT analysis of competitors.

5. Feasibility Assessment

- Market Entry Barriers:
 - o Tariffs, non-tariff barriers, legal constraints, cultural challenges.
- Resource Allocation:
 - o Required financial investment and ROI estimations.
 - Operational adjustments needed for entry.

6. Recommendations for Market Focus

- Prioritisation of target markets based on research findings.
- Rationale for selected opportunities.

Internationalisation Strategy - Part 2 - Strategy for Selected Country/Countries

1. Executive Summary

- Highlight the selected country/countries for internationalisation.
- High-level objectives for entering this market.

2. Country Specific Analysis²

- **PESTEL Analysis:**
 - o Political: Stability, trade policies, international agreements etc.
 - o Economic: Market size, GDP growth, exchange rates, purchasing power
 - o Social: Cultural norms, consumer behaviours, and trends etc.
 - o Technological: *Infrastructure, digital adoption, and innovation etc.*
 - o Environmental: Regulatory focus on sustainability and green practices
 - o Legal: Intellectual property laws, labour regulations, taxation etc.

3. Market Entry Strategy³

- Entry Mode:
 - Options such as direct exporting, joint ventures, franchising, licensing, or setting up a local presence.
- Positioning and Differentiation:
 - o Tailoring products/services to meet local preferences.
 - Highlighting competitive advantages in the new market.
- Partnerships and Networks:
 - o Potential collaborations with local distributors, suppliers, or business networks.

4. Marketing and Sales Strategy4

- **Customer Targeting:**
 - Segmentation and profiling of the target audience.
- **Promotional Activities:**
 - o Campaigns and channels best suited to the market.
- Pricing Strategy:
 - Pricing models aligned with local purchasing power and competition.

³ Ibid ... ⁴ Ibid ...

² If more than 1 country is identified, then this section shall cover each country identified

5. Financial and Operational Planning⁵

- Budget Allocation:
 - Detailed financial plan for entering and sustaining operations in the market.
- Supply Chain and Logistics:
 - Adjustments needed for efficient delivery and operations in the new market.
- Human Resources:
 - o Hiring and training needs for local talent.

5. Action Plan for the Upcoming Year

- Key Milestones and Timelines: Outline critical steps for the next 12 months, including market entry activities and strategic initiatives.
- Marketing Campaigns: Specific promotional activities, digital campaigns, and localised advertising efforts to raise brand awareness in the new market.
- Partnerships and Networking Activities: Actions to secure local partners, distributors, or networks and establish business relationships.
- Resource Allocation: Plan for the required resources (financial, human, operational) to support international expansion.
- Sales and Distribution Channels: Steps for setting up and managing sales and distribution in the selected country/countries.

6. Risk Analysis, Mitigation, Monitoring and Evaluation

- Identification of key risks:
 - o Economic instability, political uncertainties, cultural misalignment.
- Risk mitigation strategies for smooth market entry.
- KPIs:
 - Metrics to measure success, such as market share, sales growth, and customer acquisition.
- Review Mechanism:
 - o Regular evaluation of performance and adaptation of strategies.

3.4 Standards & Awards for SMEs

The advisory leading to the acquiring of a standard or award, procured from an external Service Provider which is registered with the IB and is autonomous and unrelated to the Beneficiary Undertaking. Only advisory services related to the acquisition of organization-wide or management system standards or awards shall be eligible under this scheme. This includes, but is not limited to, standards and certifications that enhance an enterprise's operational efficiency, governance, sustainability, or quality management systems are eligible.

Whilst an elaborate template could not be provided, the advisory process shall be thoroughly documented and presented in a comprehensive report.

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⁵ Ibid ...

4. Reimbursement Process

Business Reports for SMEs

• Lump sum of €4,000

Marketing Strategy for Micro & Small Enterprises

- 80% on the submission of the Marketing Strategy (contract, proof of payment)
- 20% following the completion of the *Action Plan for the Upcoming Year* (evidence of implementation)

Internationalisation Strategy for SMEs - Part 1

- 80% on submission of the Internationalisation Strategy Part 1 (contract, proof of payment)
- 20% on signing of GA for the Internationalisation Strategy Part 2 or evidence of further focus on recommended market.

Internationalisation Strategy for SMEs - Part 2

- 80% on submission of the Internationalisation Strategy Part 2 (contract, proof of payment)
- 20% following the completion of the *Action Plan for the Upcoming Year* (evidence of implementation)

Standards & Awards for SMEs

 100% following the submission of the Advisory report and the certification (standard or award) acquired

5. Compliance and Reporting Obligations

- Service Providers must maintain accurate records of all consultancy services provided.
- Any changes to registered consultants must be communicated to the IB via msd.eufunds@gov.mt.
- The IB shall not be liable for any payments to the Service Provider for participating and registering under the Consultancy Service Providers.
- The IB shall not be liable for any unhonoured payments due by enterprises to consultancy Service Providers with respect to any services rendered.
- Service Providers found in breach of guidelines may face deregistration.
- If a Consultant would like to offer his services to more than one service provider, a copy
 of the consent from the Authorized Representatives of both service providers is to be
 submitted.
- The IB reserves the right to verify any qualifications, experiences and conduct with third parties.
- The IB reserves the right to refuse or withdraw a registration by any Consultancy Service
 Provider on the basis of actual, potential or perceived reputational harm and/or
 unwanted or unfavourable publicity to the Measures and Support Division, the
 Government of Malta and EU funds.

Annex I. Application Process

- The authorized representative of a service provider is to submit an application by downloading a copy from https://fondi.eu from here. Subsequently, the applicant shall fill all the required details of the Service Provider in the form. Evidence and other supporting documentation can be enclosed to the same email when a copy of the complete application is sent to msd.eufunds@gov.mt.
- 2. All the details related to the Service Provider have to be filled in. A minimum of 1 Consultant needs to be registered filling in his details in the pertinent section *Lead Expert*. The detailed for any additional expert added to the application must be filled in too. The application includes a section on the applicant's applied methodologies, which practices must be identified and explained accordingly.
- 3. Once an application has been submitted electronically, an acknowledgment email shall be sent out to the authorised representative's email address, informing them that an application has been submitted. It is only once the IB has approved a submission that a Service Provider is added to the list of Registered Service Providers. The IB reserves the right to request the applicant for further information or additional documentation where and as necessary.
- 4. Once an application has been approved, the Registered Service Provider may wish to add or remove an existing expert or change any details relating to an existing expert. The authorised representative is to inform the IB by sending an email to msd.eufunds@gov.mt clearly indicating the new details.
- 5. In each case, the new expert will only be added to the service provider once the submission has been approved by the IB.
- 6. If an expert is no longer employed or their services are otherwise not being utilized in relation to supported activities under the respective, the Service Provider shall notify the IB by sending an email to msd.eufunds@gov.mt.
- 7. If a Registered Service Provider wishes to deregister and hence be removed from the list published on Fondi.eu, it needs to inform the IB by sending an email to msd.eufunds@gov.mt.
- 8. These guidelines replace all previous versions and incorporate the latest advisory scheme requirements. For further details, visit https://fondi.eu/business-enhance/ or contact msd.eufunds@gov.mt.

Annex II. Declaration of Unrelation Template





Business Reports for SMEs – Declaration of Unrelation

I hereby declare that (insert name of Service Provider) is external to the beneficiary Undertaking, and the parties are autonomous and unrelated to each other. The consultancy services provided are not of a continuous or periodical nature or related to the usual operating costs of the beneficiary or related to legal or regulatory obligations arising from the nature of the beneficiary's operations and economic activity.

Details of Beneficiary		
Project Code		
Beneficiary Name (Registered Name)	(BLOCK LETTERS)	
Beneficiary Registration No		
VAT No.		
Official Address		
e-mail		
Telephone No.		

(BLOCK LETTERS)	(BLOCK LETTERS)
Name & Surname Service Provider Authorised representative	Name & Surname Consultant
Signature	Signature
Date	Date

Data Protection Declaration -







Marketing Strategy for Micro & Small Enterprises – Declaration of Unrelation

I hereby declare that (insert name of Service Provider) is external to the beneficiary Undertaking, and the parties are autonomous and unrelated to each other. The Marketing Strategy provided is not of a continuous or periodical nature or related to the usual operating costs of the beneficiary or related to legal or regulatory obligations arising from the nature of the beneficiary's operations and economic activity.

Details of Beneficiary	
Project Code	
Beneficiary Name (Registered Name)	(BLOCK LETTERS)
Beneficiary Registration No	
VAT No.	
Official Address	
e-mail	
Telephone No.	

(BLOCK LETTERS)	(BLOCK LETTERS)
Name & Surname Service Provider Authorised representative	Name & Surname Consultant
Signature	Signature
Date	Date

Data Protection Declaration







Internationalisation Strategy for SMEs – Declaration of Unrelation

I hereby declare that (insert name of Service Provider) is external to the beneficiary Undertaking, and the parties are autonomous and unrelated to each other. The internationalisation Strategy provided is not of a continuous or periodical nature or related to the usual operating costs of the beneficiary or related to legal or regulatory obligations arising from the nature of the beneficiary's operations and economic activity.

Details of Beneficiary	
Project Code	
Beneficiary Name (Registered Name)	(BLOCK LETTERS)
Beneficiary Registration No	
VAT No.	
Official Address	
e-mail	
Telephone No.	

(BLOCK LETTERS)	(BLOCK LETTERS)
Name & Surname Service Provider Authorised representative	Name & Surname Consultant
Signature	Signature
Date	Date

Data Protection Declaration -







Standards & Awards for SMEs - Declaration of Unrelation

I hereby declare that (insert name of Service Provider) is external to the beneficiary Undertaking, and the parties are autonomous and unrelated to each other. The consultancy leading to the acquiring of a standard or award provided is not of a continuous or periodical nature or related to the usual operating costs of the beneficiary or related to legal or regulatory obligations arising from the nature of the beneficiary's operations and economic activity.

Details of Beneficiary	
Project Code	
Beneficiary Name	(BLOCK LETTERS)
(Registered Name)	
Beneficiary Registration No	
VAT No.	
Official Address	
e-mail	
Telephone No.	
(BLOCK LETTERS)	(BLOCK LETTERS)
Name & Surname	Name & Surname
Service Provider Authorised representative	Consultant
octrice remain nationised representative	Sonsardine
Signature	Signature
Date	Date

Data Protection Declaration -



