

Lessons Learnt Supporting SMEs on Eco-Innovation

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The Centre for Sustainable Design® (CfSD) at the University for the Creative Arts (UCA) and partners have provided eco-innovation business support to over 550 SMEs in the South-East of England between 2009-2013. The proposed paper will share the findings, conclusions and lessons learnt from two European Commission funded projects.

Since 2009, 530 SMEs have benefitted from eco-innovation business support provided by the CfSD-led Sustainable Supply Chains through Innovation (SUSCIN) project funded through the European Regional Development Fund (ERDF). In parallel, between 2009-2011 CfSD supported 30 SMEs in more depth through the INTERREG IVA '2 Seas' Environmental Market and Innovation Development' (EcoMind) collaborative project.

Through SUSCIN, 200 SMEs have received more than 12 hours of eco-innovation business support through various interventions. A series of 'Meet the *Green* Buyer' brokerage events and '*Green* Dragon' workshops were organised offering SME suppliers of eco-innovative products/technologies/ services the opportunity to pitch to buyers from private and public sector. The '*Green* Dragon' sessions were designed as a follow-up to the brokerage events and led to around 15 leads for eco-innovative SME suppliers with commercial benefit resulting from around half of those. CfSD also organised 35 GreenThink © *green* innovation workshops (rated 88% by participating SMEs) that led the identification of a significant number of new product/market opportunities and novel concepts. Through SUSCIN, CfSD also held 16 events (attended by 160+ SMEs) addressing eco-innovation and related topics such as green marketing, Intellectual Property Rights (IPR) and ISO14006 (new eco-design standard).

Within EcoMind, CfSD led a series of 'open *green* innovation' and ecodesign workshops, 2 product development meetings, made introductions for 8 SMEs leading to 16 meetings and made connections leading to both business development event attendance for 7 SMEs at 8 events and to 3 partnerships being built by 3 SMEs. In addition, 8 UK companies were introduced to eco-innovation networking hubs (Enviu and Syntens) in the Netherlands through a 2 day EcoMind cross-border visit to Rotterdam. CfSD also prepared 20 reports and presentations and completed 3 company cases. Referrals to complementary business support were typically made in the areas of funding, IPR and procurement.

Business support provided through both SUSCIN and EcoMind enabled SMEs to accelerate the development of eco-innovative products/technologies/services and helped SMEs better apply sustainability thinking to their business and *products*, typically relating to: a) existing eco-innovative solutions; enhancing eco-business aspects, market links; improved market research and marketing material and b) new eco-innovative solutions concepts; providing external input and referrals e.g. to potential collaborators, customers (or those representing their interests) and potential funders.

The paper will provide the findings, conclusions and lessons learnt from EcoMind and SUSCIN (that concludes in June 2012) related to the application and diffusion of eco-innovation (resource efficient and low carbon) amongst SMEs. New data from a survey on the 'impact' of SUSCIN on SMEs will also be reported and discussed and case studies from both projects will be highlighted.