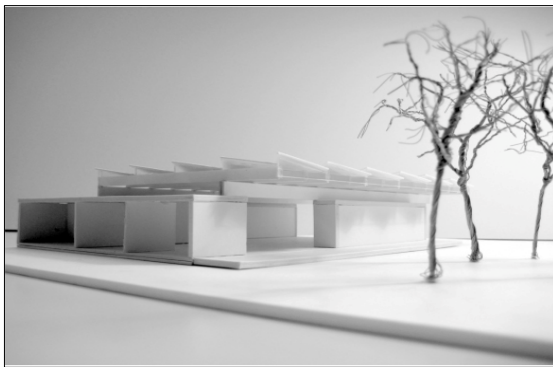


Design leads way in SME innovation



Businesses are coming under growing pressure to reduce the carbon footprints of their products and services and although many recognise that creativity and innovation will assist in this process, it still remains a problem.

However, a new initiative from Cranfield University is set to help small businesses view this problem as a potential opportunity by offering advice and assistance in the

development of new low carbon products and services.

The Sustainable Design-Led Innovation (SDI) programme has been specifically designed to help SMEs look at their business practices and identify ways of innovating across all areas of their operations – from idea development to final delivery – with the overall aim of reducing the carbon footprint across their innovation-cycle.

Martin Grant of Cranfield University explained: “The SDI will work with businesses to help them improve their knowledge and understanding of sustainable design-led practices. This advice and practical support will include identifying new market opportunities, reducing the carbon footprint of the products and services and measuring the results of their sustainability.”

The programme focuses on providing practical tools through a series of guided workshops, benchmarking and auditing techniques, as well as CEO leadership programmes. The importance of transferring knowledge is also recognised and the sharing of any innovative ideas is encouraged through key networking activities.


As part of the knowledge transfer element of the programme, businesses will also have access to experience that would otherwise be unavailable to them, including the University of the Arts, London and from large corporate partners in Cranfield University’s open innovation network, such as Proctor & Gamble, BT, Lego.

The incorporation of on-line delivery methods is a crucial element of the programme. As well as ensuring that the SDI is available throughout the entire region it also introduces businesses to new effective lower carbon ways of working.

“To achieve targets for cutting CO2 emission we must educate the design thinkers and innovators of the future. The key to this is developing an approach to teaching the techniques involved in sustainable design processes,” continued Martin. “It is also important to remember that this isn’t simply theoretical, it will give businesses a significant competitive edge going forward, through greater ability to develop innovation opportunities and stronger product and service differentiation.”

As part of the programme business owners are able to harness state-of-the-art design innovation methods in the UK’s first national Centre for Competitive Creative Design (C4D). Based at Cranfield University, C4D helps businesses to explore new ideas and concepts and gain first hand understanding of the different low carbon development processes to improve not only their carbon footprint, but performance and productivity.

The SDI programme has been made possible as a result of £815,510 funding from the European Regional Development Fund (ERDF). At a total cost of £2 million, the programme aims to help 1,000 small businesses over the course of three years.

Priority Axis 1			
Funding:	Total Project Cost: £2,038,776 ERDF: £815,510		
Solution for Business Product:	Networking for Innovation		
Scope:	East of England	Project Duration:	August 2009–July 2012
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ERDF Details:	<p>The European Regional Development Fund (ERDF) is a seven-year investment programme part financed by the European Union. Its objective is ‘towards low carbon economic growth’ in the East of England and €110.9 million has been allocated to our region.</p> <p>The fund aims to help small and medium size enterprises respond to the challenges of climate change and the huge commercial potential behind a low carbon economy.</p> <p>For more information visit w: http://www.communities.gov.uk/regeneration/regenerationfunding/europeanregionaldevelopment/eastengland/ or tel+44 0303 4446400</p> 