



## Building capacity for ecodesign in SMEs. Regional perspectives.

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While supranational policy frameworks contextualise sustainable development (SD), the delivery of these policies occurs at the regional level. The Welsh Assembly Government (WAG), as a devolved administration of the UK, has a statutory obligation to promote SD in the exercise of its functions. Historically, manufacturing and mineral based industries were the basis of economic strength of Wales, but in recent years the balance has shifted towards the service sector and lower volume, value added production. The latter has been facilitated by a stable base of established and resilient businesses combined with fast-growing high technology companies

As part of this commitment to SD<sup>1</sup>, funding was provided through the Materials Action Programme (MAP)<sup>2</sup>, to establish Ecodesign Centre Wales (EDC). EDC focuses on building capacity and capabilities in industry, public sector organisations and higher education so that effective ecodesign can happen in Wales. For the purpose of clarity, we define ecodesign as a strategic design management process that is concerned with minimising full life-cycle impacts of products and services (e.g. energy, materials, distribution, packaging, end-of-life treatment, health, usability). Although it is primarily focused on product and process improvements, ecodesign considers the social and economic impacts of products and services.

The focus of EDC activities to date has been facilitating ecodesign and sustainable innovation in four design-led SMEs from priority sectors. These sectors include electronics, food and drink, low-carbon technologies and manufacturing. EDC is also working in partnership with the course leaders from the four universities in Wales that offer product design degrees. The aim is to provide a platform for the sharing of skills and knowledge with a view to mainstreaming ecodesign and sustainability issues within existing curricula.

EDC will be monitoring and evaluating these activities in order to feedback to key stakeholder groups in Wales. Through the insights gained, EDC will develop regional specific recommendations on how to scale up interventions on ecodesign and sustainable innovation in SMEs. EDC believe that these insights will be transferable to different regions and will contribute to international knowledge transfer and capacity development.

This presentation outlines observations and experiences to date. It identifies key action areas for intervention and highlights the need to reposition intervention strategies depending on institutional, organisational and operational capabilities.

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<sup>1</sup> Wales has a statutory obligation, built into Section 121 of the government of Wales Act 1998, to promote Sustainable Development in the exercise of its functions.

<sup>2</sup> MAP funds are derived from the landfill tax scheme for businesses.

