

PrISMS

OVERVIEW AND PRELIMINARY RESULTS



IfM ECS worked with 120 companies over three years during the PrISMS programme to:

- ▶ help create 126 new jobs and safeguard 246 others
- ▶ in the first year, increase the cumulative turnover for 60 of those firms by £18.8m (14%)
- ▶ improve the business strategy and capability development of the companies
- ▶ make the firms' products and operations more sustainable
- ▶ reduce energy consumption and minimise the environmental impact of manufacturing processes
- ▶ develop business support tools to diagnose and address firms' strategic and operational challenges
- ▶ transfer knowledge and skills to enable companies to continue to improve after PrISMS

The PrISMS (Practical & Innovative Solutions for Manufacturing Sustainability) ERDF programme ran for three years until 30 June 2015 and was managed and delivered by IfM ECS.

Its aim was to transform the growth prospects of 50 start-ups and 70 SMEs (with up to 250 employees) across the Eastern Region, creating new jobs and safeguarding existing posts.

The programme aimed to help firms to:

- ▶ grow revenues and profitability
- ▶ make their products and operations more sustainable
- ▶ create and safeguard jobs in the firms taking part in PrISMS as well as across their supply chains.

It was delivered by experienced IfM ECS facilitators, all of whom have worked in manufacturing at a senior level for many years and have supported hundreds of start-ups and SMEs.

PrISMS was designed to make efficient and effective use of the company's time and to ensure that knowledge and skills were transferred to the firms, enabling

them to build capabilities in key areas of the business.

PrISMS was distinct from other programmes to improve manufacturing firms in that it aimed to enable SMEs to strategically review their business, adopt low-carbon practices and generate jobs, rather than solely focusing on improving productivity.

The companies ranged from one-person early-stage ventures to firms that have been trading for decades and employ close to 250 people, the maximum permitted for participation in PrISMS.

Support was offered to start-ups during the early stages, and as the firm begins to grow, in such areas as: identifying key areas of focus; evaluating promising opportunities; developing the business strategy; creating the business; scaling up; and developing a sustainable business model.

IfM ECS worked with more established SMEs to: identify key issues and priorities; determine the most appropriate markets and products; win more business; build the capabilities the company needs; and

reduce environmental impact.

As part of the programme, IfM ECS developed business support tools to help companies diagnose and address strategic and operational challenges.

The approaches used have robust theoretical underpinnings, derived from University of Cambridge research, and are configured for start-ups and SMEs. Most had been extensively tested through practical application, such as the IfM ECS Prioritisation tool and Business Strategy tool, but some used the latest research, working with 'pioneers' to help develop and refine the approaches.

The ECS team built a relationship with the firms over time and developed an in-depth understanding of their operations. Their recommendations could be implemented, assessed and evaluated prior to embarking on the next step. With the aid of mentoring and advice, firms were able to make progress towards their goals.

Firms were also able to benefit from the knowledge of various IfM research centres and could host student projects.

PrISMS

The PrISMS (Practical & Innovative Solutions for Manufacturing Sustainability) programme aims to transform the growth prospects of 50 start-ups and 70 smaller manufacturers across the Eastern Region – creating more than 140 new jobs and safeguarding many more. The programme is funded by the European Regional Development Fund (ERDF), with match funding from the EPSRC Centre for Innovative Manufacturing in Industrial Sustainability, ideaSpace and IfM Education and Consultancy Services (IfM ECS) and supported by 11 county and district councils in the region. It is managed and delivered by IfM ECS, which bases its methods on research at the University of Cambridge's Institute for Manufacturing (IfM). For more information visit www.ifm.eng.cam.ac.uk/services/prisms

IfM ECS

IfM Education and Consultancy Services works with companies of all sizes to help create and capture value and with national and regional governments to support and grow their industrial sectors. It does this by transferring the new ideas and approaches developed by researchers at the Institute for Manufacturing (IfM) through a programme of education and consultancy services. IfM ECS is owned by the University of Cambridge. Its profits are gifted to the University to fund future research activities. For more details on its work with SMEs visit www.ifm.eng.cam.ac.uk/services/overview/sme/

ERDF

PrISMS is part-financed by the East of England European Regional Development Fund (ERDF) Programme 2007-2013. The Department for Communities and Local Government is the managing authority for ERDF in England, which is one of the funds established by the European Commission to help local areas stimulate their local development by investing in projects which will support local businesses and create jobs. The East of England ERDF programme (covering Bedfordshire, Cambridgeshire, Essex, Hertfordshire, Norfolk and Suffolk) supports low carbon economic growth and has allocated approximately €95 million.

Case study company highlights

Case studies were completed on a selection of firms to reflect the range of company sizes and sectors:

- ▶ Photofabrication – photochemical machining company
- ▶ Molecular Dimensions – specialist in protein crystallography
- ▶ Colour Marketing Services – colour cards developer and producer
- ▶ Harlow Group – precision sheet metalwork manufacturer
- ▶ Milbank Concrete Products – precast concrete products manufacturer
- ▶ Newton Commercial – manufacturer of classic car interior trim
- ▶ Ecotile – manufacturer of PVC interlocking floor tiles
- ▶ dB Broadcast – broadcast industry systems integrator
- ▶ Happy Academy – creator of unique children's greeting cards.

Some of the outcomes achieved with these individual firms included:

- ▶ Increase revenues by 41%
- ▶ Double the net profit compared with the budget projection
- ▶ Increase laboratory capacity by more than 60%
- ▶ Cut the production time for some factory jobs by 50%
- ▶ Remove process bottlenecks to reduce lead times by 50%
- ▶ Reduce power consumption for key process by 33%
- ▶ Cut energy costs by £25,000 a year.

Feedback to IfM ECS from the firms included the following:

- ▶ "Working with IfM ECS has allowed us to have an independent assessment of our business in key areas. As a result we have managed to save a significant amount of money and explore some great opportunities for improvement."
- **Bill Timpson, MD, Harlow Group**
- ▶ "IfM ECS has been first class in its approach in helping our business grow, giving us clarity in difficult situations and good practical advice on the production floor and in the boardroom."
- **Jonny Newton, MD, Newton Commercial**

Government Minister Baroness Stowell visited Cambridge to meet some of the firms in the PrISMS programme



- ▶ "The mentoring kept me on track, helped me to simplify things and focus on what is important. You want to deliver solutions and add values to your business idea. In return, you get all the support you want and need."

- **Sara Hlin Halfdanardottir, founder, Happy Academy**

- ▶ "We have worked closely with IfM ECS and we see the benefits. It allows us to tap into resources we don't have, to see things in a different way and to make decisions on that basis. We have a different mindset – it's about getting better all the time."
- **Paul Rea, Operations Director, Photofabrication**

Nicky Athanassopoulou and John McManus, Industrial Fellows at IfM ECS, said: "The PrISMS programme has given us a great opportunity to work directly with small and medium-sized businesses across the East of England, at no direct cost to the companies themselves.

"We have been able to help them to grow and to create jobs against a difficult economic background; to reduce their costs in a sustainable way; and to help them to be really clear about where they want their businesses to get to in the medium term, and how to do it."

IfM Education and Consultancy Services

Institute for Manufacturing, Charles Babbage Road, Cambridge CB3 0FS, United Kingdom

Tel: +44 (0)1223 766141

Email: ifm-enquiries@eng.cam.ac.uk

Web: www.ifm.eng.cam.ac.uk

Twitter: @IfMcambridge