

PROJECT IDEA - *IDÉE DE PROJET*

The Project Idea Form is a public document, if you wish to keep it private at between the JS and your partnership at this stage, please advise your Facilitator / *Le Document Idée de Projet est un document public, si vous souhaitez qu'il reste privé entre le SC et votre partenariat pour le moment, merci d'en informer votre coordinateur de l'animation.*

Project Name: ICI – Innovate, Connect, Internationalise

Nom du projet: ICI – Innover, (se) Connecter, Internationaliser

Contact / *Contact* : Emma Watson

Organisation / *Organisme* : Kent County Council

Address / *Adresse* : County Hall, Maidstone

E-mail / *E-mail* : emma.watson@kent.gov.uk

Specific Objective / *Objectif spécifique* :

1.1 - To increase the delivery and uptake of innovative products, processes, systems and services in shared smart specialisation sectors.

1.1 - Accroître le développement et l'adoption de produits, processus, systèmes et services innovants dans les secteurs de spécialisation intelligente partagés

The ICI project aligns with the following goals set out in the 'France Channel England Cooperation Programme':

- SO1.1 "Facilitate increased business opportunities and actions to support the export of innovations to new markets" (page 25) and possibly facilitate "inward investment into the FCE area" as a secondary focus
- Examples of actions under SO1.1 "Joint business development, for example relating to innovation management, cluster development and creation of business and commercial networks, and supporting the internationalisation of SMEs" (page 29) and "Joint development of cross border tools to provide business to business opportunities" (page 29)
- "Increase the delivery uptake of innovative products, processes, systems and services in shared smart specialisation sectors" "focus on smart specialisation sectors that are shared across the Programme Area, which include; ... agro food; life and health science"

Summary description of the project idea (1 page max.) / *Description synthétique du projet:*

The ICI project will help SMEs to innovate and internationalise and will connect French & British SMEs and encourage joint working and collaborations

It will do this through the following main activities:

1. **Engage with SMEs interested in internationalisation** on both sides of the Channel in 2 or 3 main target sectors (agri-food and life sciences – to be confirmed by final partnership)
 - Carrying out communication activities and using local business networks to identify companies wishing to explore international trade opportunities
2. **Provide in-depth training and ‘innovation’** workshops to help companies to tackle barriers to internationalisation and to help the companies to innovate in order to become export ready.
 - ‘Innovation’ within the context of the project means helping companies to adapt their businesses processes, products and services to make them ready for internationalisation such as creating new packaging, marketing materials or labelling for international markets.
 - This activity will make use of external experts (including DIT in the UK and Team Export France colleagues in France) to provide detailed and relevant information for companies
 - Market-testing activities for beneficiary companies e.g. attending consumer shows or events aimed at the public to test reactions to products from the other side of the Channel and establish the potential market (business to consumer / B2C research)
3. **Organise Franco-British stands at major international trade shows** to provide opportunities for small groups of companies to jointly exhibit their products / showcase their services
 - For example a shared ‘pavilion’ with 5 French and 5 British companies would be organised at major B2B trade shows in London, Paris, Germany etc.
 - This could also be an opportunity to promote the FCE partner areas as a place to do business

Need and Demand / *Besoin et Demande* :

Recent research in Kent ([2017 Kent SME Internationalisation Study](#), Kent Business School) highlighted that SMEs wishing to internationalise (export their products and services) face many challenges:

- They lack access to international contacts and networks
- They lack knowledge about how to adapt products, services and processes for international markets
- They lack internal capacity and resources to focus on international markets

These challenges were also described in the UK’s [2018 HMG Export Strategy](#) but have been heightened by the remaining uncertainty around the UK’s withdrawal from the EU and businesses need assurance of the right advice, information and contacts in neighbouring international markets.

In France, the 2018 « [Stratégie du Gouvernement en matière de commerce extérieur](#) » states that “L’amélioration de nos performances à l’export est l’un des objectifs de la politique du Gouvernement.”

For the Hauts de France region, the “[Schéma Régional de Développement Economique, d’Innovation et d’Internationalisation – Région Hauts-de-France](#)” emphasises the need to increase export activity in the region and ICI supports the objectives of the ‘Booster-exportation’ priority, especially encouraging the participation in international trade shows.

The project’s target sectors have been chosen as SMEs within them usually show high export potential and the sectors are those outlined in the SELEP Industrial Strategy and the SRDEII for Hauts-de-France.

The partners will work up a detailed description of each target sector at the start of the project to explain how companies in supply chains and supporting the main sectors could also benefit from ICI.

Cross border added value / Valeur ajoutée transfrontalière :

In order to internationalise and understand business opportunities in another country, it is essential for businesses to have access to 'in-market' contacts, knowledge and expertise. The ICI project will provide exactly that for SMEs in France and England to enable them to seek export and collaboration opportunities in each other's country and in wider European markets. This type of activity cannot be delivered on a purely national basis as real contacts and intelligence from a company's target international market are required for trade to become possible.

Pavilions at trade shows are generally organised by national organisations but companies are required to pay to participate which can be a barrier. Trade shows can be a place where companies from the UK and France compete with each other and against businesses from all over the world. This project is different and will organise a collaborative approach whereby French and British companies with complementary products and services will work together and showcase their products together.

Examples of concrete actions / Exemples d'actions concrètes :

- Joint communication plan and activities to engage with beneficiary companies
- Workshops and training sessions to help companies to innovate and adapt products and services for international markets including sharing market expertise from the partner country
- Joint design and creation of Franco-British trade show pavilions to enable companies to showcase their innovations to global audiences as part of a common programme
- Jointly implemented 'follow-up' support to companies to ensure that they are able to pursue and maximise leads generated and make international sales

Changes that the project will contribute to / Changements auxquels le projet contribuera :

The project will make a positive contribution to "SO1.1 Number of innovative products, processes, services, or systems designed: which measures new products, services, processes or systems designed with the support of the FCE Interreg Programme. This includes both creation of an entirely new idea, or the development of an existing idea." It is anticipated that at least 30% of the businesses (SMEs) supported (exact number TBC by partnership) by ICI will make a direct modification or adaptation to a service, product or process to enable them to be able to access international markets.

SMEs will also be supported to become more innovative, more international and better connected to opportunities in foreign markets. Companies which export tend to demonstrate higher levels of growth and productivity. Some of these benefits can be hard to capture and measure within the lifespan of a short project but the partners will gather as much data as possible from the beneficiary SMEs about how participation in the ICI project has helped with business development. We anticipate being able to gather data about the following criteria:

- Number of new processes / adaptations to products or services per SME to help with international market access (innovation)
- Number of SMEs gaining new knowledge and skills

- Number of SMEs with increased capacity to internationalise
- Number of new international contacts and leads gained
- Increase in export-related turnover
- (Direct export orders and sales as a result of the project – this is likely to take place after rather than during the project lifespan)

Capitalisation on previous initiatives/ Capitalisation sur de précédentes initiatives:

The project is responding to the findings of research work which was carried out as part of the Interreg Europe SIE ([SME Internationalisation Exchange](#)) project which identified barriers faced by European SMEs including those bases in the UK and France.

The project builds on learning from the [Interreg 2 Seas ISE project](#) whereby companies which help companies with innovation and internationalisation. SMEs were able to attend international trade shows as visitors to carry out market research but SMEs which took part in the project expressed a keen interest in actually exhibiting at major international events.

Two of the ICI partners also participated in the Interreg NWE [Boost4Health project](#) which helped Life Science SMEs with internationalisation through a voucher scheme. Many participants also requested access to trade show stands but this wasn't possible within B4H.

The project also responds to recommendations from the Enterprise Europe Network's '[How to Assist European SMEs in their Internationalisation Process](#)' which emphasises in particular the value of participating in international trade fairs.

Sustainability/Durabilité :

The project will facilitate contacts between SMEs from France and the UK – the partners will work to ensure that contacts made will be retained and built on after the project ends.

For example, the partners will engage with existing contacts at the Franco-British Chamber of Commerce during the project and colleagues there will be able to continue to advise SMEs in the future. The project partners in Kent and Hauts-de-France will also ensure that the project has a high profile within the recently established 'Straits Committee' as part of the ongoing Economic Development workstream which has backing from local Elected Members on both sides of the Channel. This will help to ensure that links established and activities carried out by ICI may be supported and developed in the future.

Companies will also retain new skills, innovations and leads after the life of the project which will be embedded into their future development.

Partners (with their geographical areas) already involved in the project idea / Partenaires (en précisant leur zone géographique) déjà impliquées à ce stade d'idée de projet:

Kent County Council (Kent, UK) Economic Development Team

Kent Invicta Chamber of Commerce (Kent, UK)

Eurasanté (Hauts-de-France) – TBC

Boulogne Développement (Pas de Calais) - TBC

If the final partnership only covers a small geographical area in the FCE zone, efforts have been made with the help of the FCE facilitators to involve partners from the wider FCE area. In order to ensure that benefits are felt across the FCE area, the partners will produce a guide to supporting SMEs through trade shows which will be disseminated to LEP contacts in the FCE on the UK side and to relevant stakeholders on the French side including regional development agencies (AD Normandie etc.)

Potential partners sought (skills wanted) / *Partenaires potentiels recherchés (compétences recherchées) :*

France / France :

Business support organisations, Chambres of Commerce, Sector Agencies or Clusters in Agri-food (including supply chain) or Life Sciences (which could include e-health and silver economy)

Partners need to have good contacts with SMEs in their area.

Start date and end date of the project / *Dates de début et de fin du projet:*

1 January 2021 to 30 June 2023

Estimated project cost / *Coût estimé du projet:* €850,000

Other comments / *Autres commentaires :*

The project will complement the national 'Team Export France' and Department for International Trade (UK) offers which can sometimes provide subsidised access to trade shows on a national basis but ICI will not duplicate such activities as the approach is different. Indeed, the ICI partners will work closely with these organisation, particularly during the 'export readiness' project activities by bringing in international trade advisors to share their expertise and assist the beneficiary companies – this will tie in to the wider work of the 'Kent International Business' initiative on the UK side which brings together all of the public sector export support services in Kent/the SE as well as efforts of the SRDEII to 'coordonner le réseau des acteurs de l'export' in HDF.

Has a programme facilitator from the InterregVA FCE Joint Technical Secretariat provided advice to the project applicant? / *Un coordinateur de l'animation du Secrétariat Technique Conjoint FMA a-t--il conseillé le porteur du projet ?* Yes / *Oui*

If yes, facilitator's name / *Si oui, quel est le nom du coordinateur de l'animation ?*

Name / *Nom:* Katy Hornby