

PLATO: SUSTAIN

Introduction for SMEs

"[Sustainability is] the capacity to provide for the needs of the current generation without compromising the ability to provide adequately for future generations" DR Gro Harlem Brundtland 1987

Plato GB Limited has secured funding from the European Regional Development Fund (ERDF) and the South East England Development Agency (SEEDA) to deliver the PLATO: Sustain project across the South-East region.

Between 2009 and 2011, PLATO: Sustain will provide c.160 small and medium sized businesses across the South-East with **free** access to a unique, specialist, business and personal development programme aimed at improving their business sustainability, and encouraging them to help companies within their supply chains and their own employees to take positive steps to adopt environmental friendly behaviours. The programme is worth more than £3,500 to each SME business participant.

The programme lasts two years culminating in a graduation and award ceremony in October 2011. PLATO: Sustain is an adaptation of the highly successful PLATO™ programme, a proven method used by 9,000 past participants across Europe, including several hundred in the UK. Plato GB and its partners will work together to provide a unique form of facilitated peer-group learning. This learning proffers expertise and advice to help small and medium sized businesses in the South-East to adopt sustainable business, production, design and innovation practices to improve performance. The ultimate aim is a measureable reduction in participant companies' contribution to the region's ecological footprint.

Why should I participate?

PLATO: Sustain helps businesses improve performance and reduce the region's ecological footprint by:

- ◆ **Radically improving personal and business development skills;**
- ◆ **Providing business coaching and problem solving;**
- ◆ **Raising awareness of the cost and benefits of a sustainable business practice;**
- ◆ **Facilitating learning through shared experiences and proven expertise of facilitators;**
- ◆ **Increasing business turnover from new and improved products and processes that have whole life costs built in at every stage of the process, from design to end of life;**
- ◆ **Achieving tangible cost savings by reducing energy, waste and water usage;**
- ◆ **Implementing and supporting employee behaviour change to reduce the carbon footprint of employees as individuals;**
- ◆ **Helping to find better ways of engaging with suppliers to develop "greener" relationships that maximise opportunities to improve environmental impact;**
- ◆ **Building client bases and supply chains.**



INVESTOR IN PEOPLE



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How are PLATO Groups run?

PLATO: Sustain groups are hosted by two facilitators recruited via a unique partnership with large companies with a track record of introducing sustainable business practices, innovative green technology and waste-reduction strategies. Each facilitator uses their knowledge and experience to support and encourage their PLATO group members to improve.

Each PLATO: Sustain "Action" group consists of 15/16 key decision makers from diverse, non-competing businesses. Meeting monthly over a two-year period they address a wide range of sustainable business, design and innovation issues, supporting each other to develop. PLATO participants share knowledge and experiences to stimulate ideas and support each other to take the strategic decisions that determine how they improve their sustainability and grow their business.

All 10 groups will gather at 6 large networking meetings to connect with other PLATO: Sustain members during the 2 year programme. This forum provides a valuable opportunity to exchange knowledge and share experiences of implementing sustainable business, design and innovation practices. Expert speakers will talk on key topics. Other organisations that have successfully transformed through sustainable innovation and design will be invited to share experiences.

How can I take part, and is there a cost to participate?

Application to take part in this **free** 2 year business support programme is invited from owner-managers, CEOs or directors of established SMEs with 10+ employees and turnover in excess of £1m.

Profile for PLATO: SUSTAIN SME Participants

To join a PLATO: Sustain group, you will need to be an owner, chief executive or senior-level director of an established Small or Medium sized Enterprise (SME). Prospective participants for the **PLATO: Sustain Programme** will typically have the following characteristics.

Your business will:

- ◆ **Employ between 10-249 employees;**
- ◆ **Turnover in excess of £1m per annum;**
- ◆ **Fulfil the key company criteria of an 'SME'**
- ◆ **Have been operating for at least three years;**
- ◆ **Have the aspiration and potential to grow;**
- ◆ **Have the desire to introduce and implement sustainable design, innovation and eco-friendly business practices to their business;**

PLATO: Sustain Introductory Events

Between April 2009 and June 2009 a series of 10 introductory events will be running across the South East region to provide potential SME participants with more information about PLATO: Sustain, to explain the commitment required and likely benefits of participating.

These events will provide prospective businesses with an opportunity to register their interest in participating in the PLATO: Sustain programme and meet with the PLATO: Sustain Programme team to discuss business and personal suitability to participate in the programme.

Anyone wishing to participate in a PLATO: Sustain Group should contact the Plato GB team on **08457 35 45 55**.