

Small Businesses: Global Presence?

Small businesses seeking to exploit overseas opportunities are set to get a helping hand, thanks to an initiative launched by the University of Kent and supported by the Canterbury Enterprise Hub.

The Reciprocal Soft Landing initiative developed in partnership with the International Trade Center at Radford University and the New River Valley Economic Development Alliance, Virginia, provides high growth and high-tech small businesses with the ability to set up subsidiary companies in key international markets. This initiative goes far beyond conventional soft-landing arrangements where organisations help incoming companies to find premises and staff to set up business in their countries. It also offers clients political, economic and cultural business advice. Individuals will benefit from personal support to help them become part of the local community.

The aim is to establish a network of partner organisations around the world that will provide business and cultural support to incoming companies and their families, but will also proactively support clients from their own country to engage with other network partners to develop international trading opportunities. To date, interest in participating in the network has been received from universities and technology parks in Poland, Norway, India, and Northern Ireland, and other potential partners have been identified in Australia and Canada. Each partner will be selected due to their ability to provide access to funding and research support, established distribution networks and agents within their region.

The Canterbury Enterprise Hub has an established track record of providing such advice and support for businesses that wish to set up a branch or subsidiary company in Kent, and has supported new businesses from France, Germany and Norway. The Hub is now developing opportunities for its clients to internationalise their businesses, and at least eight Hub clients are looking to participate in a trade delegation to Virginia at the end of April to explore possible markets and to meet potential customers and investors. Companies from Virginia will be coming over later in the year to explore opportunities for setting up in Kent as a base for trading in Europe.

David Butler, Director of the Canterbury Enterprise Hub said: 'Competition in the world of international trade is increasingly fierce. We are witnessing an age of unprecedented change and transformation – this initiative not only recognises these changes but provides a relatively low-risk opportunity and cost effective way for innovative businesses to prosper in global markets'.