

Proposed models for implementing an ecodesign initiative in Wales

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Abstract

The Welsh Assembly Government (WAG) has recognized that industry and other key stakeholders need to embrace ecodesign thinking and practice. A national ecodesign initiative for small and medium-sized enterprises (SMEs) has been proposed to provide a structured approach of engaging and enabling these stakeholders. Design Wales were commissioned to work on Stage 1 of the initiative. This paper introduces the proposed models for implementing the ecodesign initiative in Wales along with the next stage of the development process.

Key words: *ecodesign, national initiative, models, Wales, SMEs*

1. The Welsh context

Since devolution 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. Wales has produced a number of action plans to facilitate this process. The Business and Environment Action Plan (BEAP) aims to integrate environmental concerns with economic aspirations and sets a strategic vision for environmental best-practice as a competitive device. The first planned outcome from the BEAP to take a holistic life cycle thinking approach is an ecodesign initiative.

Established in 1994, Design Wales is funded by the WAG to provide free and independent advice on all aspects of design to Welsh industry and to offer strategic design advice to the WAG. Practical support is provided by a team of eight advisors. Design Wales

aim to encourage and enable a long-term strategic approach to design in Wales and believe that ecodesign is essentially just 'good' design. In 2004 Design Wales were commissioned by the WAG and the Welsh Development Agency (WDA) to develop a detailed proposal for a Welsh ecodesign initiative (Stage 1) for SMEs.

2. Stage 1 of the ecodesign initiative

This stage is exploratory and developmental in seeking to establish best practice in ecodesign initiatives (including national and company level); along with developing a number of models for implementation and a detailed proposal for a Welsh based initiative. Such an initiative has to be 'fit' for Wales in terms of the primary economic and environmental objectives of the WAG. Stage 1 also involves an initial exploration of how the initiative could be best integrated with key stakeholder groups. This exploration included a mapping exercise to re-orientate the business and environment (B&E) support network in the context of a product life cycle [1]. The intention of Stage 1 is to clearly define the scope and realistic outcomes of running an ecodesign initiative in Wales. It was agreed from the outset that the initiative should be of practical benefit to industry, have transferable outcomes and be self-sustaining. A key element of Stage 1 was engagement with the existing design community in Wales through briefing events and a series of in-depth interviews with leading product design consultancies. Some of the initial findings from Stage 1 were outlined in a previous paper [1].

3. Proposed models

Following the assessment of international best practice (including the examination of over 30 national ecodesign initiatives) a number of tailored models have been drawn up for a Welsh ecodesign initiative. The proposed models seek to assist in the delivery of the BEAP through stimulating ecodesign and life cycle thinking within existing management systems. The models offer a comprehensive approach to the implementation of ecodesign in Wales utilizing the existing B&E support network and a core ecodesign group through a multi-stakeholder life cycle team. They establish a number of mechanisms and measures that allow for longevity, continuous improvement and innovation. These models remain flexible and are currently under consultation by the WAG, the WDA and other key stakeholders in Wales.

3.1 Model 1 - Four tier ecodesign initiative

This model involves a programme of training, bespoke one-to-one advice and mentorship, promotion and research. The delivery mechanisms of this model would be conveyed through the main four themes of information, training, support and promotion.

3.2 Model 2 – Design-link

This model focuses on the early integration of the ‘mainstream’ design sector. It will provide the appropriate training, support and tools to the design sector and utilize these new skills in a pilot demonstration initiative.

3.3 Model 3 - Mentor-led workshop initiative

This model focuses on high profile awareness-raising of ecodesign within Wales using mentors from industry. It will provide companies with the incentives, tools and support to help them introduce ecodesign as early as possible in the design stage.

3.4 Model 4 - Product orientated environmental management systems (POEMS)

This model focuses on the integration of a product aspect into a company’s environmental

management system. The Welsh POEMS should systematically monitor and control the environmental impacts of products and should be considered as an extension and elaboration of an Environmental Management System (EMS)¹.

4. Next stage

The current period of consultation will allow for further engagement with key stakeholders and the selection of priority sectors. These sectors will be prioritized using indicators such as the potential for economic growth, level of influence of design and previous environmental commitments. A cross sectoral survey will be undertaken to assist the selection process. This will be followed by a series of briefing events and testing of the models on the priority sectors. The testing and subsequent refinement will be facilitated by focus groups and in-depth interviews. Along with setting an ecodesign vision for Wales, the initiative will aim to achieve a ‘critical mass’ of commitment to ecodesign and develop a framework to maintain a long-term dynamic of ecodesign within Welsh SMEs.

5. Conclusions

The first six months of Stage 1 has proved invaluable in establishing international best practice, enabling Design Wales to develop four implementation models that are ‘fit’ for Wales using a multi-stakeholder life cycle team approach. It is anticipated that the final proposal for a Welsh based ecodesign initiative will be presented to the WAG and the WDA early 2006.

References

[1] S. O’Rafferty and F. O’Connor, “Developing a national ecodesign initiative in Wales”, Proc. 10th ERSCP, Belgium, October 2005.

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¹ Wales has its own 5-stage EMS known as Green Dragon.