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**Project/Activity Title:** Post Graduate Diploma in Enterprise Development

**Goals/what you set out to do:**

The over-arching aims of the course are to aid in the economic development of the South East region through the support and encouragement of indigenous, innovative, knowledge-based industry with significant employment and export potential. This programme aims to equip entrepreneurs in the start-up phase of venture creation with the skills, knowledge and confidence necessary to give their business the best possible chance of success.

**Description of the action/event/project (Who, what, when, where, how):**

The Post Graduate Diploma in Enterprise Development is a one year business start-up support programme, run by the WIT School of Business’ Centre for Entrepreneurship in conjunction with Enterprise Ireland and Tipperary Institute. It is based on the students’ participation on the South East Enterprise Platform Programme (SEEPP).

Although the programme itself has been running since 1998, it gained official HETAC accreditation as a Level 9 Post Graduate Diploma in Enterprise Development in 2005, following intense academic evaluation, the first programme of its’ kind in Ireland to be accredited to such a high academic level.

The key element of the programme involves the delivery of approximately thirty days workshops covering a wide range of topics applicable to start-up ventures. The workshops are delivered by a balanced mixture of industry-experienced academics and external consultants and are tailored to be as practical and interactive as possible.

An innovative feature of the programme is that all participants on the programme are actively working full time on setting up their business, and can therefore apply the knowledge gained from the workshops immediately and appropriately in their developing business. This is one of the core strengths of this “live learning programme”. Workshops cover such topics as budgeting and cashflow management; market research; marketing planning; PR; strategic planning, writing a business plan, intellectual property rights, HR, and personal development.

The course has been specifically tailored to the needs of start-up entrepreneurs. The workshop schedule is structured to maximise the return on their time invested in attending the workshops. This formal learning has immediate practical implications for the development and growth of their business, and extra support, in the form of mentoring, advice, feedback, extra workshops, can be organised if specific issues arise. Business clinics with professionals such as Patent agents, PR consultants, Tax advisors etc are also organised, free of charge.

However, significant learning also takes place on an informal basis. Peer group learning is integral in participation on the programme and the entrepreneurs on the programme each year prove to be a source of invaluable support, advice and business contacts for the other participants. The experience of past programme participants can also be leveraged in many ways, with some past participants acting informally as mentors to current programme participants.

Other supports provided by the programme include access to funding, the provision of incubation facilities for the duration of the entrepreneur’s participation on the programme, access to experienced business and academic mentors and business networking opportunities.

**Research** - There is significant, regular interaction between the industry-based entrepreneurs and the many researchers in the WIT Centre for Entrepreneurship ([www.centreforentrepreneurshipwit.com](http://www.centreforentrepreneurshipwit.com)) and in WIT’s acclaimed Telecommunications Software & Systems Group (TSSG - [www.tssg.org](http://www.tssg.org)). Programme participants, past and present, are currently assisting with research at Masters and Ph.D. levels, in the areas of regional knowledge transfer, technology transfer, enterprise supports, female entrepreneurship and life coaching. WIT lecturers who facilitate and deliver workshops frequently use the companies on the programme as case studies

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for their under-graduate classes, with some classes working on specific issue-based research assignments on behalf of the start-up ventures. Research is conducted on an on-going basis into how the programme can evolve to suit the growing and changing requirements of start-ups and SME's. Participant feedback, collected during and after the programme, is incorporated into the programme structure, where possible with immediate effect. This ensures that the programme remains relevant, and addresses the challenges faced by entrepreneurs as and when they occur.

### **Impact/outcomes/results/what you have achieved so far:**

The SEEPP programme has been supporting entrepreneurs in the South East region since 1998, and has worked with over 140 business start-ups in a broad range of industry sectors in this time. Each year, up to 20 start-ups participate on the programme. In the most recent research carried out in November 2005 by the programme management, 69% of participants were still trading, with a further 18% still in development (comprised mainly of those who had most recently completed the programme). Follow-up research is currently being conducted to up-date these results. This research will provide detailed analysis of the level of employment, intellectual property, and turnover generated by start-ups assisted by the Programme.

In recent times, the course has also been adapted to the needs of Enterprise & Innovation Centre Managers throughout the country. The first such programme in Ireland commenced in September 2007, based largely on the structure of the SEEPP programme, but delivered in a manner and format more suited to the needs of the participating managers. As these managers interact on a daily basis with entrepreneurs in the early stages of business development, participation on this programme will provide them with the insight, skills and methodologies necessary to advise and support their client companies. This qualification will become a pre-requisite for any aspiring business advisor, including enterprise centre managers, in Ireland in years to come.

### **Plans for further work/development:**

The WIT Centre for Entrepreneurship aims to extend the range of supports provided to entrepreneurs at all stages of development in the region. Other programmes currently run by the Centre include a six-week pre-start-up course for nascent entrepreneurs, and a six month course specifically for existing, growth-oriented female entrepreneurs. Research is currently being conducted by the Centre for Entrepreneurship into the follow-on support requirements of SEEPP/PG Diploma in Enterprise Development participants. Research is also on-going into family-led entrepreneurship and serial entrepreneurship, and the process of knowledge and technology transfer between industry and academia.

### **Your own observations/comments:**

This programme is a prime example of how innovative, research-led teaching can be appropriately applied in the business context. The on-going research, including participant feedback, ensures that the programme remains current, relevant and applicable to all participants as they develop and grow their business. The fact that the programme has been adapted by WIT and is now being delivered to enterprise centre managers, who interact on a daily basis with early-stage entrepreneurs, shows the need for such innovative, research-led initiatives, which address the practical demands of business advisors in today's challenging, dynamic business environment.

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