

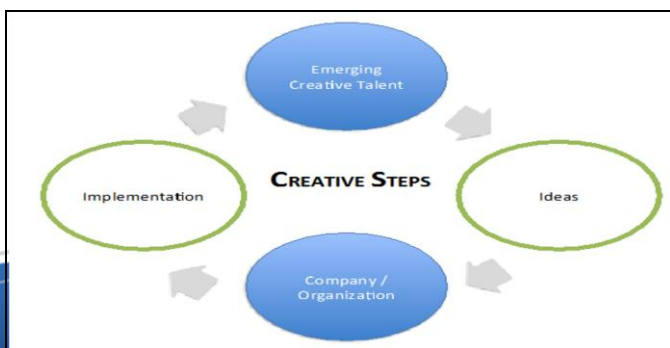


‘A view from the edge gives the best perspective’

[www.creative-edge.eu](http://www.creative-edge.eu)

## Creative Steps initiative connects young creative individuals with existing business needs

Creative Steps is a Creative Edge initiative coordinated by Kemi-Tornio University of Applied Sciences (KTUAS). The Creative Steps concept works on the basis of cooperation between new creative talents and established businesses. In the world of business, new ideas are vital to innovation, which come from human creativity. The Creative Steps concept matches emerging creative talent with existing business needs and helps creative talents gain much needed experience in the business world. In addition to this, it helps businesses to connect with, and harness the expertise of students and new graduates. The initiative is designed to encourage innovation, where businesses present a problem for students to solve, providing new challenges, but also opportunities for creativity to flourish and grow. The pilot programme was launched in January in Kemi-Tornio, Finland. It brought young, creative talents from Finland, Sweden, Ireland and Northern Ireland together to work on projects assigned by international businesses and organisations. Projects focused on areas such as improved product design, new product design and communication of concepts through visual mediums. Participants worked on their projects in teams and spent time in both Finland and Northern Ireland. They learned about the field of business and experienced the culture of both countries. Two hands-on, week-long workshops assisted and guided participants with the application of their creative skills in a business environment. Participants also interacted in the virtual environment for two more weeks to complete their projects, which were then finally presented to the businesses involved.



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**In this issue...**  
 This edition of the Creative Edge newsletter focuses on Creative Steps and highlights real world business issues that young creative talents worked on, as well as the experience of participants that took part.

## A walk through the Creative Steps process

The students and graduates that participated in the Creative Steps initiative worked on real projects assigned by real businesses. But how does such an initiative operate? We walk you through the logistics of the Creative Steps process.

Firstly, a business project had to be selected. A project was chosen from each of countries that the Creative Edge partners are located. Participants were part of workshops, and also had virtual contact. Two week long workshops took place, one in Finland, and one in Northern Ireland. The workshops combined lectures, brainstorming, interactive sessions and field trips. The remaining work occurred through the virtual environment. Participants worked on their projects in teams, and were also in direct contact with the business or organisation that initiated the idea for the project.

To get the work started, a workshop took place in Kemi-Tornio, Finland. It was here that participants were divided into four international multi-skilled teams. Teams were named 'Team Ireland', 'Team Northern Ireland', 'Team Finland' and 'Team Sweden' and each assigned a project. But before specific teams were assigned their projects, a brainstorming session including all participants gave each team ideas to work with when they began focusing on their assigned projects. Also, as each team progressed with their work, they pitched the ideas developed to the other team members, to get their insights and feedback.

Timo Puukko and Anitra Arkko-Saukkonen from KTUAS led the Creative Steps initiative, coordinated the workshops and provided support and guidance to students throughout the month-long Creative Steps process.

The workshops also focused on helping participants to shape their projects to a correct fit for business. Before teamwork began, KTUAS experts gave presentations on creative thinking and business thinking. Marika Saranne talked about business thinking, market communications, future market trends and consumer trends. Anitra Arkko-Saukkonen presented on creative thinking and different methods to generate creative ideas.

*Anitra Arkko-Saukkonen from KTUAS presents on creative thinking at a Creative Steps workshop*



## Connecting creatives in the periphery

Creative Steps participants were also distant from each other at times. This made online forums very important to facilitate Creative Steps. Coaching sessions and presentations were given through the iLinc platform. In addition, each team created a Facebook group and held Skype meetings. After the workshops, students continued to work on their projects for a further two weeks and the final results were presented one month after the workshops. Creative Steps also has its own [Facebook](#) page.

## Creative Steps expands participants' cultural experiences

Locating the workshops in two of the partner regions gave participants a chance to experience the broader local culture. While in Northern Ireland participants visited the Ulster Folk and Transport museum. In Finland, participants got a chance to try a Finnish sauna experience, visit the Snow Castle of Kemi and a polar house. These activities are also linked to the objectives of Creative Steps, allowing participants and creative sector businesses to engage. Visits to these cultural spaces allowed participants to observe cultural business in action. Also for example while in Northern Ireland, participants visited R4 Tyres, which assigned one of the projects worked on. In Finland, in Tervola, an evening was held where entrepreneurs from start-up and more established companies in the Lapland area got together. An inspirational panel of four entrepreneurs from different sectors told their stories about working in the creative sector.

## Creative Steps business projects

Creative Edge participants had a wide range of talents, and included students and graduates of screen-writing, film production, journalism, graphic design, art, digital media and visual arts. They applied their skills to business projects as part of Creative Steps and two examples are outlined below.

### An interactive children's book app

The businesses that assigned the projects for Creative Steps were a very important part of the Creative Steps process. Spinfy, a Finnish company that develops interactive children's storybook apps, was one such company. These types of children's storybooks are an exciting reading experience where children can interact with a story and guide it by making it personalised with their own touch.

Spinfy's project for the Creative Steps participants was to design a new interactive children's book. This included developing the idea for the story, while also creating and designing the primary characters and background designs. The children's book was to be both educational and fun. Team Finland was assigned to this project. From the experience of the team, it was felt that a key part of beginning the creative process in this case was to think in a child's frame of mind. Team Finland developed characters that a children's story could be based around. They also produced illustrations. Spinfy's reaction to the outcome of Team Finland's project work was positive. Spinfy also said it would continue to cooperate with the team members if it decided to develop the concepts into storybook apps.

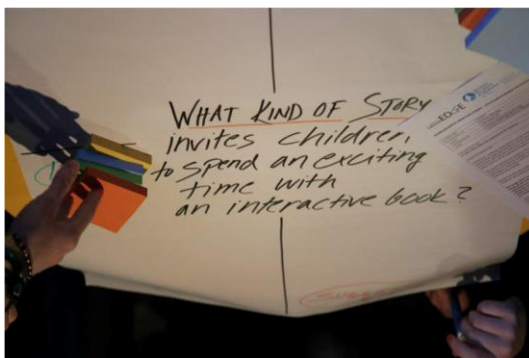
### Creative concealment of tyre bales and their use as a creative material

The Creative Steps initiative highlights the role of creative sector knowledge and skills in wider business sectors. The example of R4 Limited, a tyre recycling company, and the project that Creative Steps participants worked on for this company, demonstrates this.

R4 Limited has been producing tyre bales for several years. Their tyre bales have been used in a number of construction projects throughout Europe and the USA. R4 Limited distributes tyre bales uncovered. The look and bulky nature of tyre bales is a drawback of the product. The main challenge for Creative Steps participants was to make tyre bales look better, helping the company attract new customers. Devising a method of wrapping or disguising the tyre material could make the bales more marketable. In addition to this, this project focused on developing ideas around new places where tyre bales could be utilised, helping R4 Limited to further capitalise on their product.

Team Northern Ireland worked on this assignment and their work generated many new ideas and solutions for how to make tyre bales look more appealing aesthetically. R4 Limited received a package of different kinds of ideas from Team Northern Ireland's work and was pleased with the outcome. When the Creative Steps programme finished R4 Limited was discussing the continuation of the project.

*The images below depict an example of how ideas were generated during the workshops.*



## The Creative Steps experience

During Creative Steps, Creative Edge partner KTUAS was interested to gain feedback from participants on their experience of the initiative, to understand what was done best and what can be worked on in developing future Creative Steps programmes. The words of the participants involved in Creative Steps tell its tale best. Here we delve into the details of participant diaries tracking their involvement in the initiative.

Being part of Creative Steps was the first time participants had met each other. If participants were to work well together, it was important for participants to begin get to know each other before project work began. Some exercises, such as tin foil modelling, helped participants to cross this divide. One participant commented:

*“When we were split into teams, the tin foil modeling project was great. I thought it was a great way to break to ice in the team and show how creative we could be. It was a great way to get the team working together instead of jumping straight into projects”.*

Creating a relaxed learning environment was important for Creative Steps. Incorporating activities outside of project work was an important in achieving this. For example participants had a chance to experience the wider culture of Northern Ireland and Finland, such as visiting tourist attractions and while in Finland having a sauna experience.

The overall atmosphere that was created can be summed up by the following participant’s comments:

*“It was very laid back and not too serious. Everyone chatted to each other as equals and didn’t see us as students or anything. It was a great way to make contacts and get to know people”.*

This relaxed environment was not however to take away from the valuable learning experience that the Creative Steps pilot programme was intended to be. Feedback from participants shows that Creative Steps achieved the correct mix:

*“We had theory lessons. The amount was also in balance... These opened up our thinking, and gave us tools we used to work forward”.*

One central part of Creative Steps was connecting businesses with young talents. Engaging with business was challenging, but a positive learning experience that helped participants to grow in confidence and skill:

*“...He also gave us very useful information on the company and also let us know some of our limitations... We found our business very approachable and luckily for us he was very open-minded and loved our creative ideas. He told us to break barriers and not to be afraid to be innovative and creative”.*

Creative Steps combined face to face workshops with online interaction. The effectiveness of such an approach was another important aspect of Creative Steps to gain some feedback from participants on. When not working together in the workshops, teams stayed in touch with each other, and the businesses, via Skype, telephone and email. This was important to keep the momentum going, for example:

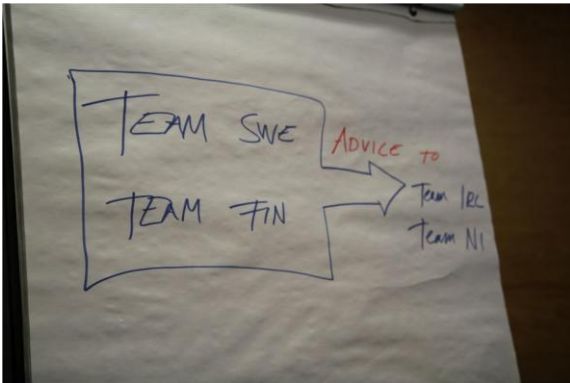
*“The team needed a lot of driving in the early stages, towards the end everyone came into their own and contributed well to the final outcome”.*

*Participants of Creative Steps at work*





*Visual depiction of how teams should help each other*



Online communication in initiatives such as Creative Steps, that brings international teams together, is vital. However, this should not replace in person contact. For example, these comments help to illustrate:

*“I would definitely recommend the project to others but I do feel there is more to be gained from face to face working with people over online communication”.*

*“In my opinion the face to face part was very important. Nothing can ever replace it”. “The online weeks were a good experience but were very hard. We had to work in our free time and work around everyone’s schedule.”*

*“Even though we could see each other on Skype I still felt it was hard to get your opinions across”.*

Some methods of online communication were preferred over others:

*“Skype and Facebook were the best for us, sorry have to say, Moodle and iLinc are not our favorites”.*

Students also took away additional skills applicable in the wider working world. For example:

*“Prezi training took place today which was useful and introduced a new tool so we would be able to present our presentations to our client online and in a new and innovative way. I feel Prezi is something I will use regularly now after this project is finished”.*

Overall, the Creative Steps initiative was rated positively by participants. They learned about international cultures and people and used their creativity in the business world. For example, one participant commented:

*“I learned how to use many new programs for communication and I have gained valuable experience working in teams in different countries. Modern technology has been a vital tool throughout this experience”.*

To sum up, Creative Steps from the participants perspective was:

*“Fun, creative and very useful at the same time”.*

*Visit to the Snow Castle*



The Creative Steps initiative was a great success with positive feedback received from the students, graduates and businesses who took part. The programme has the potential to be replicated internationally.

*Participants of the Creative Steps programme*



## Update on Creative Edge Activities

The Creative Edge project received €1.1 million in funding through the European Union's Interreg 4B initiative under the Northern Periphery Programme (NPP) and brings together universities, development agencies and industry bodies from Ireland, Northern Ireland, Finland and Sweden. The main objective of the project is to promote the active participation of local creative organisations and businesses in global markets while also aiding them in their ability to attract and utilise local emerging creative talent in these markets. Some recent and planned activities of the project are as follows:

- Creative Edge Operational Committee and Steering Committee meetings – June 14<sup>th</sup> and 15<sup>th</sup>, Skellefteå, Västerbotten, Sweden.
- Creative Edge was a partner in the Creative Summit - June 12<sup>th</sup> and 13<sup>th</sup>, Nordanå theatre in Skellefteå, Västerbotten, Sweden.
- Creative Edge Talents from the Mentoring Programme attend the FilmArc master class, June 9<sup>th</sup> to 11<sup>th</sup> in Skellefteå, Västerbotten, Sweden.
- Launch of the online export platform [www.mycreativeedge.eu](http://www.mycreativeedge.eu) – June 13<sup>th</sup>, Skellefteå, Västerbotten, Sweden.
- Talent voucher scheme – pilot scheme is running in conjunction with [www.mycreativeedge.eu](http://www.mycreativeedge.eu).
- Export skills workshops are planned for the coming months providing information for creative businesses on exporting.

Our forthcoming newsletters will focus on the innovative activities mentioned above, and others, taking place as part of Creative Edge, such as the Mentoring Programme, the Lurgan Creative Hub and the Craigavon Borough Council Creative Edge Seminar Series.

*Creative Edge project partners and creative industry members at the Creative Summit in Skellefteå, Sweden*



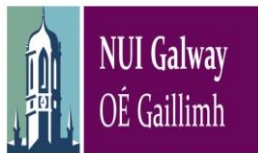
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