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# *Creative Edge* Talent Voucher Scheme: Implementation and Lessons EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

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# Creative Edge Talent Voucher Scheme: Implementation and Lessons

## Executive Summary

The aims of the *Creative Edge* Talent Voucher Scheme were to encourage collaboration within the creative sector, promote innovation in creative businesses and provide an opportunity for work experience and portfolio development for emerging creative talent.

The Scheme was implemented through the EU Interreg IVB Northern Periphery Programme (NPP) funded *Creative Edge* project.<sup>1</sup> Three of the project partners, Film i Västerbotten, Kemi-Tornio University of Applied Sciences and the Western Development Commission, implemented the Scheme in their regions – Västerbotten (Sweden), Northern Finland and the West of Ireland.

### How the Scheme operated

Early in the *Creative Edge* project it was decided that the Talent Voucher Scheme should be administered through the export platform website (MyCreativeEdge: The Creative Showcase for Europe's Northern Edge [www.mycreativeedge.eu](http://www.mycreativeedge.eu)), also being developed under the project. This would reduce the administrative burden and if membership of the site was a requirement to apply for the Scheme, it would be an added incentive to join the site.

The Talent Voucher Scheme operated as follows:

- Creative business members of MyCreativeEdge could apply for a Talent Voucher for a specific creative project/assignment.
- This was done through an online application form in the members' area of the site.
- If awarded a Talent Voucher, the creative business selected and contracted an emerging creative talent, who is also a member of the site (profiled in the Employ a Creative section), to undertake the project / assignment.
- On completion of the assignment, the creative business paid the creative talent directly and then submitted a claim to the *Creative Edge* project partner to be reimbursed.
- Vouchers were for a maximum value of €2,000.
- The available budget meant ten Talent Vouchers were available in total – five from the West of Ireland, three from Västerbotten (Sweden) and two from Northern Finland.

When submitted, application forms were automatically e-mailed to the project partner organisation in the region of the applicant. The application form had four questions:

- Details of the assignment. Please outline the assignment you would like to apply for a Talent Voucher to support (400 words max.)
- What will be the main benefits for your business? (200 words max.)

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<sup>1</sup> For more information see [www.creative-edge.eu](http://www.creative-edge.eu)

- What will be the main benefits for the emerging creative talent? (200 words max.)
- The value of the Talent Voucher is €2,000. If this assignment will require additional resources, please give details of any contribution your business will make. (400 words max.)

The Scheme opened for applications on 13 June 2013 with the launch of the MyCreativeEdge website. The deadline was 20 September. During this period the Scheme was promoted in press releases, e-mails sent to creative enterprises and to trade and industry associations and at events. Emerging talent were encouraged to contact businesses they would like to work with and suggest they apply for a Voucher. Social media was also used to raise awareness and e-mails were sent to all members of MyCreativeEdge from the eligible regions.

## Selection and implementation

By the deadline, 24 applications were received – 12 from the West of Ireland, 10 from Västerbotten and two from Northern Finland. Each application was assessed using the same criteria and 10 were selected:

From the West of Ireland

- Allan Curran Architects <http://www.mycreativeedge.eu/profile/allan-curran-architects/>
- Black Hole Studios <http://www.mycreativeedge.eu/profile/black-hole-studio/>
- Cox Power Architects <http://www.mycreativeedge.eu/profile/cox-power-architects/>
- Donegal Designer Makers <http://www.mycreativeedge.eu/profile/donegal-designer-makers/>
- Leitrim Design House <http://www.mycreativeedge.eu/profile/the-leitrim-design-house/>

From Västerbotten (Sweden)

- David Sandberg <http://www.mycreativeedge.eu/profile/david-sandberg/>
- Kulturstorm <http://www.mycreativeedge.eu/profile/kulturstorm/>
- Lucky Star Music <http://www.mycreativeedge.eu/profile/lucky-star-music/>

From Northern Finland

- Ilme Innoroom LTD <http://www.mycreativeedge.eu/profile/ilme-innorooms/>
- SunSää <http://www.mycreativeedge.eu/profile/sunsaa/>

Each of the successful applicants was contacted about the conditions of the Scheme. These included submitting a short report on implementation of the assignment with their claim, along with proof they had paid the contracted talent.

The next step for the businesses was to select a creative talent featured in the Employ a Creative section of MyCreativeEdge to undertake the assignment. They contacted them directly to make arrangements and the specific details of how the assignment would be completed and the cost were agreed between the business and the talent.

The assignments were implemented during October and November 2013. Eight were completed with reports and claims submitted and payments made by the end of the year. Two of the approved Vouchers did not proceed during the period. The outcomes of the eight completed assignments were:

**Allan Curran Architects with Paul McGuckin Photography:** A Talent Voucher was provided to Allan Curran Architects (Donegal, West of Ireland) for new professional photography of their previous work to show development and maturing of buildings and sites. Interior and exterior photography of eight locations was undertaken by Paul McGuckin Photography (Donegal, West of Ireland). This material has been used in the development of Allan Curran Architects' website and in other promotional material.

**Cox Power Architects with inTandem Web Design:** A Talent Voucher was provided to Cox Power Architects (Mayo, West of Ireland) to re-design their website to be responsive on different devices, to enable better targeting of international clients and export markets and to be more easily managed by the company. The re-design was conducted by inTandem web design (Sligo, West of Ireland) and has resulted in a much higher Google ranking and a more professional and modern looking site.

**David Sandberg with Trickfabriken:** A Talent Voucher was provided to David Sandberg (Umeå, Västerbotten, Sweden) to assist with the development of digital environments and effects for his 'Kung Fury' movie and its trailer. Trickfabriken AB (Skellefteå, Västerbotten, Sweden) worked with David Sandberg to produce visual effects shots of different environments such as a police station and the top of a Miami skyscraper. The Kickstarter crowdfunding campaign for Kung Fury, using this trailer, raised US\$630,020 from 17,713 backers.

**Donegal Designer Makers with Shaun Egan Photography:** A Talent Voucher was provided to Donegal Designer Makers (Donegal, West of Ireland) for photography of the craft products of members of the network. Twenty-five individual craft makers and designers had their products professionally photographed by Shaun Egan Photography (Donegal, West of Ireland). These images will be used to produce a new craft trail brochure for tourists visiting the county and will link with place-based tourism marketing. The photographs will also be available to the makers and the network for other promotional uses.

**Kulturstorm with Elisabeth Widmark:** A Talent Voucher was provided to Kulturstorm (Umeå, Västerbotten, Sweden) to develop six illustrations to reflect the core values of the organisation. Kulturstorm is a non-profit association working in the cultural field. Their focus is on kids and youths with limited access to the cultural life of Umeå and Västerbotten county in Sweden. The talent who developed the illustrations for their book was Elisabeth Widmark (Umeå, Västerbotten, Sweden) and this was the first time they had ever commissioned original artwork.

**Leitrim Design House with David Knight Photography:** A Talent Voucher was provided to the Leitrim Design House (Leitrim, West of Ireland) network of craft makers and designers for professional photography of makers with their products. David Knight Photography (Roscommon, West of Ireland) took photographs of 22 makers who are members of the network with their products. Images have been used for new retail point of sale material, cards for distribution and a 2014 calendar for sale. They also form an image bank for future online and print promotional activities.

**Lucky Star Music with Hanna Karlzon Illustration & Design:** A Talent Voucher was provided to Lucky Star Music (Umeå, Västerbotten, Sweden) to develop artwork to help promote their new interactive entertainment product Lucky Star Karaoke. Hanna Karlzon Illustration & Design (Umeå, Västerbotten,

Sweden) developed the artwork and the resulting illustration reflects the combination of ideas from both companies and has been used in various formats to promote the product.

**SunSää with Jaakko Posti:** A Talent Voucher was provided to SunSää (Rovaniemi, Northern Finland) to produce promotional photography to help support SunSää's weather reactive advertising software. The Talent Voucher enabled SunSää to commission photographer Jaakko Posti (Rovaniemi, Northern Finland) to produce a series of photographs which will provide a ready-made photo gallery to assist SunSää's customers develop their adverts. This is an important added attraction for potential clients.

## Performance in meeting objectives

How the *Creative Edge* Talent Voucher Scheme performed in terms of meeting its original objectives is set out here.

- **Inter-disciplinary collaboration:** Ultimately the objective of the Scheme which was most successfully met was promoting collaboration across creative disciplines. The eight completed assignments represent a broad range of examples of how different creative disciplines can collaborate on projects such as photography of creative products, illustration of creative ideas, web design for creative services and visual effects to achieve a creative vision.
- **Experience for emerging talent:** One of the main issues for the Scheme related to a broader issue for the MyCreativeEdge website. A criteria for the Voucher Scheme was that the talent contracted needed to be included in the Employ a Creative section of MyCreativeEdge which was intended to be a 'talent bank' for new emerging talent seeking employment. However in practice many well established creative businesses chose to be featured in the Employ a Creative section. Also relatively few new emerging talents were featured on the site with less than 5% of the site's membership aged under 25 years. This meant that although one of the objectives of the *Creative Edge* Talent Voucher Scheme was to provide an opportunity for experience and portfolio development for new emerging talent, in practice this only occurred in a minority of cases. For any future scheme where this is the primary or sole objective, the criteria for the talent to be selected would need to be quite specific to ensure only new emerging talent were contracted.
- **Innovation and product/service development:** Another objective of the Scheme was to promote innovation and product/service development, bearing the mind the relatively limited time and budget available. As described above, each Voucher made a notable contribution to the development of the participants' business and some will have considerable long term benefits.
- **Incentive to join MyCreativeEdge:** A secondary objective of the Talent Voucher Scheme was to act as an incentive to join MyCreativeEdge. In the initial promotion and marketing of the site, the availability of the Talent Voucher Scheme was included as an added incentive to join. While it is not possible to judge exactly how important a role this played, by the deadline for applications to the Scheme (20 September), 240 creatives from the three participating regions had registered on MyCreativeEdge. Exactly 1 in 10 of these applied for a Voucher.

## Key lessons

A number of lessons can also be learned from the experience of designing and implementing the Scheme which may be useful for any future implementation of this or similar schemes.

- **Timing:** As the Talent Voucher Scheme was linked to the MyCreativeEdge website, it could not be launched until the site went live. This happened in mid-June. The summer months however, were not the best time to be promoting the Scheme nor for applicants to be submitting applications. The application period for any similar schemes should avoid the holiday/summer period.
- **Promotion/awareness:** A challenge with any new scheme is to make people aware of it and its purpose. It would have been beneficial to have had more time to promote the Scheme during a longer application period.
- **Simple and short online application form:** Incorporating the application form into MyCreativeEdge proved very successful in terms of administration. As a member had to be logged in to complete the form the system could 'auto-fill' all of their contact details which reduced the time and burden involved in completing the form.
- **Business selects the talent:** In the initial planning of the Scheme it was decided that the selection of the talent would be left up to the businesses. The only criteria were that the talent be featured in the Employ a Creative section of MyCreativeEdge, that a talent could not accept more than one assignment and that they be able to invoice for the work on a freelance basis. This 'arms length' approach reduced the administrative burden on the project partner organisations. It also meant the creative businesses had considerable freedom to choose the talent they felt was best suited to the assignment and their own business / working approach. Though as noted above, this meant many of the talents selected were experienced, rather than new emerging talent.
- **Duration of implementation:** This was the biggest problem expressed by participants. Due to the timing for applications and the end date of project funding, assignments had to be completed in just under eight weeks. Ideally the timeframe for implementation of Talent Voucher assignments should be longer, perhaps six months.
- **Invoicing:** As those contracted under the Vouchers included new emerging talent, issuing invoices for work may not be a familiar process for them. It may be useful to provide some business mentoring to any new emerging talent participating in such a scheme.
- **Financial procedures:** For some of the partner organisations the process of issuing payment of the Talent Voucher was a new procedure. The financial and accounting procedures in the organisations administering the Scheme need to be considered in the early design stages.

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

Export platform: [www.mycreativeedge.eu](http://www.mycreativeedge.eu)

The creative showcase for Europe's Northern Edge

