

Minutes of the ITW Meeting

“The importance of the Foreign Office and Regional Activities (in the Midlands) in internationalisation support activity”

ITW (Interregional Thematic Workshop) Meeting was held on Wednesday 13th December 2017 at Birmingham Chamber of Commerce in the West Midlands region. The list of the attendees are enclosed.

The ITW meeting was coordinated by Coventry University Enterprises Ltd (CUE Ltd) and was organised during the second day of the INTRA project study visit Coventry.

A welcome and introduction was given from John Otter, Regional Advisor of Intatrade a project run through Coventry University Enterprises Ltd who also chaired the meeting.

The workshop was a panel format attended by invited experts, with a debate in which the project partners actively participated through an open discussion.

The central theme of Interregional Thematic Workshop (ITW) was *“The importance of the Foreign Office and Regional Activities (in the Midlands) in internationalisation support activity”*

The invited panel of regional expert speakers were:

- Christine Hamilton – Deputy Director, the Midlands, Department of International Trade (DIT)
- Andy Smith – International Relationships Manager, DIT (WMCCLLP)
- Patrick McCarron – Relationships Manager – UK, DIT (WMCCLLP)
- Chair: John Otter – Intatrade Regional Adviser, DIT (CUE)

Initially Christine Hamilton highlighted the importance of the Department for International Trade (DIT) and how regional teams supported by an overseas network of over 100 Embassies, Consulates and High Commissions helped SMEs export. Christine also shared with the group that the Department for International trade was moving increasingly towards a regional management model. Throughout the discussion with partners Christine confirmed that the main

role of the DIT was to bring together policy, promotion and financial expertise to break down the barriers to trade and investment and thus helping businesses succeed. In particular Christine emphasised that regionally they were focusing on larger high value businesses in order to generate bigger export wins, which can sometimes mean there is a tension between DIT value targets and SME client needs. Hugo Barros from the University of Algarve, Portugal (UAlg) enquired whether the policy allowed the team to assist SMEs and it was confirmed that they would help all businesses despite their size.

Andy Smith joined the discussion and stressed the importance of overseas delivery partners and the global business network to meet the UK governments manifesto goal to increase UK exporters by 100,000. Additionally discussions were engaged into the specific service SMEs can expect to receive when accessing export help. The overseas network allows for a bigger integrated pool of overseas support with access to a range of differing support packages dependent on need. Specifically Andy highlighted the success of the market tailored inward meet the buyer events which pre-match buyers with potential businesses.

Patrick McCarron followed this by discussing the specific structure of the West Midlands Chamber of Commerce and how this links with regional and national policy. He presented the funding channels that support export activity in the region, highlighting the importance of the combination of funding from both the Department of International Trade and ERDF in helping to meet their ambitious export win targets.

The Interregional Thematic Workshop closed with partners having a better understanding of the importance the Foreign Office plays in regional activities and this directly support SME Internationalisation in the region and how this is embedded in national and regional strategy policy.