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Business

€1.6m project to support SMEs to make smart decisions about sustainability

Group at Munster Technological University is leading a new €1.6m international project to help small businesses implement effective sustainability measures

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Involvement in the Target Circular project are Jennifer Shore of Ludgate Hub; Louise Byrne of Killarney Park and The Ross hotels; Katy Wareing, director of strategy & innovation, Ludgate Hub; Michael Ledwith, Atlantic Bio-Cycle; Niall O'Leary, Hincks Centre, MTU Cork; Martin Johnson, Ecodiversity; and Stephen Barry-Hannon, Circular Bio Economy Cluster, MTU South West. Photograph: Andy Gibson

Ellen O'Regan

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A group at Munster Technological University (MTU) are seeking business owners and advisers to take part in a new €1.6 million international project to help SMEs implement effective sustainability measures.

The Target Circular project is a collaboration between institutions in Ireland, Finland, Norway, Iceland and Sweden, and builds on recent research into how businesses can use a more scientific approach to decision-making.

The entire project is Irish-led by the Hincks Centre of Entrepreneurship Excellence, with the support of Circular Economy Cluster Southwest, at MTU.

The project, funded by EU programme Interreg, will work with SME's to transition towards circular and sustainable practices by helping businesses to use a "strategy mapping" process to make decisions about how to effectively implement sustainability measures.

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Dr Niall O'Leary, project coordinator and research fellow at the Hincks's Centre for Entrepreneurship Excellence in MTU, said the project would provide tools for SMEs to help narrow their focus and achieve their sustainability goals.

"Ambition brings with it enthusiasm and lots of ideas. However too many ideas can be counterproductive as there is only so many hours in the day, you can't do everything. The strategy mapping process can lead to a visible transformation in participants, from almost a nervous energy from all the ideas bouncing around in their head to a more focused or strategic participant," he said.

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Target Circular has already launched its first strategic entrepreneur training pilot programme at the Ludgate Hub in West Cork, and aims to develop materials for SMEs that will be distributed through Local Enterprise Offices (LEOs) in Ireland and their equivalents in other participating countries.

Michael Ledwith is one of the business owners in the pilot training programme. He is co-founder and chief executive of AtlanticBiocycle, a start up which aims to convert fish waste into fertiliser for farms.

"It's been about looking at the end goal and working backwards. It's been very useful to see the wood for the trees. Finding out how to move forward with licensing, with partners, and understanding the best next steps to take and what steps have the highest chance of success," he said.

Louise Byrne is sustainability manager for the Killarney Park Hotel and Ross Hotel in Kerry, and one of the drivers behind the Killarney Coffee Cup Project which has seen more than 50 businesses in the town swapping single-use cups for a deposit return scheme. She is taking part in the pilot Target Circular programme to look at ways to expand the community-wide project and find uses for coffee grounds and other food waste.

"Target Circular is helping us to strategise and narrow our focus. It's more of a practical approach rather than focusing your energies in the wrong area that might not benefit the long term goals of what you're trying to achieve," she said.

Target Circular is putting out the call for business advisers across Ireland to attend its learning and dissemination event on March 6th in Skibbereen, Co Cork. Those interested in participating in the event are advised to contact Dr Niall O'Leary at the Hincks Centre of Entrepreneurship Excellence, or Circular BioEconomy Cluster Southwest.

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