

Reframing growth and environmental sustainability in SMEs

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Project description:

In recent years, governments around the world have introduced a variety of policies designed to address environmentally damaging practices in small and medium-sized enterprises (SMEs), including social enterprises (e.g. Parker et al. 2009, Calogirou et al. 2010, Blundel et al. 2013). There is also an emerging research strand that examines issues related to the organisational growth process, with the aim of encouraging a longer-term transition towards more environmentally-benign business models and inter-organisational networks (e.g. Vickers and Lyon 2014, Clarke et al. 2014). One potent argument for intervention is that many SMEs have been slow to adopt environmental improvements, with evidence suggesting that this is due to a combination of internal and external barriers (e.g. Williams and Schaefer 2013). Other reasons include: the aggregate environmental impact of SMEs; their central role in meeting governmental targets (e.g. reducing greenhouse gas emissions); and their capacity to influence broader patterns of production and consumption.

The successful applicant's research would link with a new ESRC Impact Acceleration Account engagement initiative, led by Richard Blundel and a colleague from the Environmental Change Institute, University of Oxford, along with two partner organisations. This collaborative project will co-create new knowledge on environmentally sustainable growth in SMEs by trialling an innovative approach to engaging SME owners, managers and intermediaries in facilitated workshop discussions. This will provide scope for further research on the longer-term growth of SMEs and networks in a low carbon economy context. Your research proposal should relate directly to this theme, but could focus on other countries, regions and/or particular industry sectors. It would build on the work of current and recent PhD students (e.g. Aqueel Wahga and Dr Sarah Williams) and may provide scope for additional connections with the ESRC Seminar Series 'Green Innovation: Making it Work' (2015-17) (www.open.ac.uk/esrc-green-innovation) and the ESRC Centre for Understanding Sustainable Prosperity (www.cusp.ac.uk).

References/readings:

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- Clarke, J., Holt, R. and Blundel, R.K. (2014) 'Re-imagining the growth process: (co)-evolving metaphorical representations of entrepreneurial growth.' *Entrepreneurship and Regional Development*, 26(3-4): 234-256.
- Parker, C.M., Redmond, J. and Simpson, M. (2009) 'A review of interventions to encourage SMEs to make environmental improvements.' *Environment and Planning C: Government and Policy*, 27, 2: 279-301.
- Williams, Sarah and Schaefer, Anja (2013). Small and medium sized enterprises and sustainability: managers' values and engagement with environmental and climate change issues. *Business Strategy and the Environment*, 22(3): 173-186.

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