

Sector Consortia Case Studies

Marine South East

Marine Sector.

Marine South East is the regional marine initiative of the South East England Development Agency (SEEDA) developed to address the needs of the marine sector in the South East region.

Its role is to identify and implement projects of strategic importance to the sector's growth and to work with sector teams and partnerships to support increased economic development of the marine sector in the South East.

The 5 Axis CNC Mould

This ground breaking project will help marine companies to accelerate product innovation and productivity. Specifically, access to the sophisticated Computer Numerical Control (CNC) equipment is necessary to enable the efficient building of plugs and moulds for yacht and composite production. This significantly cuts the time to market and also delivers much improved quality and accuracy. Many smaller companies still have to rely on the hand crafting of wooden plugs from which final GRP moulds are constructed, a traditional and time consuming method.

To address this shortfall Marine South East commissioned a successful study in 2006 to explore the feasibility of establishing a facility sharing arrangement for a CNC machine. The study showed that the project is viable and industry has already shown keen support for the idea.

The 5 Axis CNC mould making facility will help small businesses access state of the art facilities, at the times when they need it. This will aid rapid product development and improve cost effectiveness by sharing the capital and overhead costs with other companies.

Marine South East has developed a prospectus for the project and has already held meetings with key companies interested in investing in the machine. Investors have discussed the size and type of machine they would require and the level of investment needed.

UK marine companies are among the most innovative in the world, with the predominance of this activity centred in the South East region. Yet for many Small and Medium Sized Enterprises (SMEs) it is proving ever more difficult to access advanced product development facilities that would help them reduce the time it takes to get from the design stage to the market place.

Rapid product development is becoming an increasingly important factor in the industry's success, yet smaller companies are having to work without the help of new technology. This is mainly due to the prohibitively high set up costs and often the equally expensive general running costs of some of the more innovative facilities now being used by larger companies.

Jonathan Williams, Chief Executive, Marine South East, has been overseeing the development of this project: "This is vital in helping smaller companies develop products on a level footing with larger organisations. Although we haven't yet chosen a location for the site there are a few possibilities in the Solent area.

"One of the major hurdles we were expecting to come across was concern over the security of designs as a result of sharing a facility such as this, but potential investing companies believe that this wouldn't be an issue with the type of facility now planned.

"We have undertaken considerable research on the time and cost savings for companies where the 5 Axis machine is used. We have spoken to companies around the world, including the USA, Canada, Turkey and Slovenia; they have told us they are reducing lead times by up to 50%. With initial funding, we are confident that we can put in place a self sufficient enterprise that will help marine companies across the region improve profit and productivity."

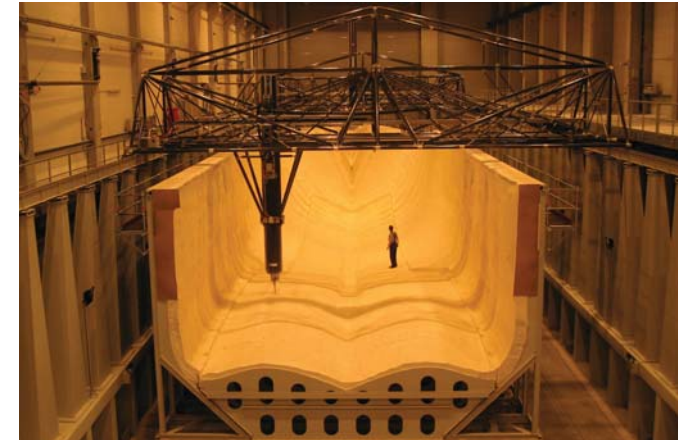
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