

# Objective One case study knowledge economy



Objective One is  
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The Objective One Partnership  
for Cornwall & the Isles of Scilly

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The projects in the Knowledge Economy investment cluster include those developing the Combined Universities and activities that support the development of much stronger links between Higher Education and business.

Developing the Combined Universities in Cornwall is considered so important to the development of Cornwall and the Isles of Scilly it was the only project specifically outlined in the Single Programming Document contract. Prior to commencing the Objective One Programme in 2000, there was no such university opportunity in Cornwall.

University level provision in Cornwall and its links with business encourages graduates to start their own businesses, attracts new business and encourages innovation and knowledge transfer, thereby increasing the overall wealth of Cornwall and the Isles of Scilly.

## Dufort Associates

Dufort Associates is a leading Design and Product Development company based in Wadebridge which successfully took part in Combined Universities in Cornwall's graduate placement scheme 'Unlocking Cornish Potential'. The business was set up by Francis Dufort in 1998 to create, develop and prototype plastic-moulded toys designed for the children's grocery market. These include promotional gifts, toys and collectable characters.

Dufort Associates is a name synonymous in the design world with innovation and inspiration, counting global companies such as Kelloggs, Walkers, Unilever and McDonalds amongst its impressive customer base.

Hannah Stanbury, also from Wadebridge, was studying for a BA Degree in Product Design with Marketing at Southampton Institute of Higher Education. Once she had completed the course she came back to Cornwall. When she heard about Dufort Associates from an article in the local paper, Hannah decided that this might well be an area of design she could work in and contacted the company. Being able to find work back in Cornwall after her degree was paramount to Hannah, as she explains: "I love Cornwall, especially being near the sea - there is nowhere like it! Being able to come back here was really important to me, but I thought it might be hard to find such a specialised job."



Unlocking Cornish Potential graduate Hannah Stanbury displays a selection of images created using Epix Technology

Through the UCP scheme Hannah was delighted to be offered a placement with Dufort Associates as Junior Product Designer on a 12 month project developing the company's new patented process, 'Epix Technology'. As she explains: "I didn't expect to find this type of job right here in my home town. It really has been an amazing opportunity, working on exciting new products and with such a wonderfully innovative team."

Epix Technology is a method of putting images into plastic injection mouldings which cannot be seen until they are back lit by either natural or artificial light. The varying depths of the plastic, generated by specialist software, create a very precise, lifelike 3D image. Hannah has been experimenting with various plastic mixes and creating a range of Epix lighting products. Ideas have included 3D postcards, table lamps with 3D image screens and string lights. The string lights have recently been licensed to a major UK distributor.

The project required skills such as 3D modelling, CAM programming, toolmaking, injection moulding and model making. This involved using specialist equipment like the CNC Milling Machine. Some of these were new to Hannah, but she explains this is beneficial, "You find yourself on a steep learning curve, with so much opportunity facing you, but you aren't alone. I had access to college mentors for specialist advice and I have learnt so much from both Francis and our Senior Designer, Simon Potter."

The project went so well that Hannah was taken on as a full time employee at the end of her

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placement. As Francis Dufort comments: “She has been involved in working on all aspects of the design business and has become invaluable.” She continues to develop Epix Lighting as it nears market release and has also used her marketing knowledge to contribute to promotional artwork and leaflets. A number of Epix prototypes have also recently been unveiled for the first time to great interest at the Spring Fair, an annual exhibition of giftware and greetings cards held at the NEC in Birmingham.

Francis Dufort sees Hannah’s input as a key factor in the expansion of their business: “UCP enabled us to take on a graduate with specific skills who could focus very much on our new products and to whom in turn we could give the experience and confidence to really take the project forward. I wouldn’t hesitate in recommending UCP to other local businesses.”

**The Unlocking Cornish Potential programme places graduates with small and medium sized businesses in Cornwall for up to 12 months. Investment in UCP through Objective One means that participating businesses receive 30% of the cost of taking on their graduate for the duration of the project. Graduates and their employers also receive support from an independent mentor, 70% of previous UCP graduates have been offered a permanent position with their host company at the end of the project. UCP was the first project launched by the Combined Universities in Cornwall (CUC) initiative to offer direct business support and is managed by Cornwall College.**

**UCP has proved highly successful in ensuring graduate knowledge remains in the region and gets harnessed for the benefit of businesses. Two key priorities for the EU’s Lisbon Agenda, which aims to achieve economic regeneration, are knowledge and innovation for growth and to create more and better jobs. UCP is an effective way of achieving these aims.**

**For more information about Unlocking Cornish Potential visit [www.unlockingcornishpotential.co.uk](http://www.unlockingcornishpotential.co.uk).**



Hannah displays a product created using Epix Technology, a method of putting images into plastic injection mouldings which cannot be seen until they are back lit by either natural or artificial light