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Our ref. RHB/MAK

24 March 2004

FAO: Gillian Barnes
South East England Regional Assembly

Dear Ms Barnes

Re.: SEEDA's SELECT COMMITTEE ON ENTERPRISE HUBS AND GATEWAYS

From a social enterprise point of view, enterprise hubs have so far had a marginal impact only, certainly from our local experience. This seems to be due to differences in culture and approach between many social enterprises and solely profit driven businesses, which tend to be the focus of mainstream business support.

SEEDA's recent draft social enterprise strategy did take account of that fact, and asked whether the Enterprise Gateway model "would be the appropriate mechanism to broker the activity of local partners and provide a channel between the regional and the local level? If no, what are the barriers related to them providing this function?"

In our Society's response to that consultation, we noted that experience, backed up by research, suggests that the cultural differences between Business Link and social enterprise clients are a barrier for effective support of this group by mainstream providers. Therefore it will be important to the success of the proposed expansion of enterprise gateways to this client group, that each initiative is led locally, where possible by an organisation already active in and respected by the sector. Such an initiative should also link with social enterprise networks, in particular in areas where they are well established.

Yours sincerely

pp. R H Burlton

R H Burlton
Chief Executive