Evaluation brief: *Mid-term evaluation of the Swedish National Incubator Programme* (NIP) (Sweden)

Key words: incubators, early-stage commercialisation, start-ups, expert panel, peer review, international comparison, survey, interviews

1. Introductory information

- Swedish National Incubator Programme (NIP) is a national measure launched in 2003 with the aim of increasing the number of new R&D intensive growth companies in Sweden. The programme was not co-funded by the ERDF.
- The study was published in 2008 titled: *Mid-term evaluation of the Swedish National Incubator Programme;* it was an interim evaluation covering the period 2005-2007, commissioned by VINNOVA and Innovationsbron.
- The evaluation was carried out by an International Expert Panel and drafted by a secretariat from Inno Germany AG.
- The duration of the study was 12 months and the overall cost is estimated to have been around €80k-€100k.

2. Summary

The NIP was to develop incubators to become world-class forums supporting leading researchers, innovators, investors and entrepreneurs. The main programme objectives were to i) increase the national capacity to facilitate research based business ideas, ii) increase the national capability and skill in managing and supporting early-stage commercialisation of research based business ideas, and iii) introduce high-quality start-ups to the financing and investment market.

The mid-term evaluation of the NIP was commissioned to identify and understand the effects of the programme so far, as well as to develop recommendations to feed into the second half of the programme period. The Terms of Reference articulated no specific questions, but revolved around the following objectives:

- Describe and comment the basic outcomes (results caused by the programme) of the NIP from an international perspective;
- Assess the NIP as an intervention to improve early-stage commercialisation of R&D in Sweden: NIP's role in the Swedish innovation system related to other structures and initiatives;
- Assess the NIP as an intervention to create and improve a profession – the management of an incubator (assessment of the results of the NIP);
- Assess efficiency of execution and management of the NIP;
- Provide recommendations for the design of NIP3 (i.e. the third phase of the programme) related to the presented plans and the evaluation results from the above mentioned areas;
- The evaluation shall compare the results of the above-mentioned areas against the results from similar evaluations of other National Incubator Programmes.

The supporting data collection and analytical methods were quite straightforward:

- A programme of 30 semi-structured interviews with incubator managers, company CEOs located in the incubators and selected regional actors (public agency and university stakeholders);

- An in-depth case study describing one of the Incubators at some length. This is a qualitative description of the incubator, its development and role in the region. It discusses reasons for creating the incubator, its funding model, and relationship with hosted companies and Innovationsbron, the agency managing the incubator scheme;
- A desk study to compare and contrast analogous Incubator programme running in Austria, France, Germany, Israel and Italy.

Overall, this was an interesting evaluation, which combined an international panel of implementation experts with a more conventional programme of data collection and analysis. The evaluation objectives were well conceived inasmuch as they encompassed issues of efficiency and effectiveness and sought to ground any analysis in comparisons with the preceding situation in Sweden and to normalise those achievements with evidence from analogous programmes in other countries.

The evaluation report presents the Panel conclusions and recommendations in a neat and accessible form, organised around the principal evaluation objectives. The report also presents the results of the accompanying desk research and primary data collection carried out by the secretariat (albeit the study team encountered some issues in data collection, which is discussed in the report): programme achievements in commercialisation realm; impact on incubation management; added value within wider Swedish landscape; efficiency of programme implementation; and an international benchmark.

The evaluation report offers many valuable insights, particularly around critical success factors and funding strategies, reflecting the deep knowledge of the panel and the secretariat.

3. Further information

- Full case study at: (url)
- Link to the evaluation study:

  www.vinnova.se/en/Publications/Products/Mid-term-evaluation-of-the-Swedish-National-Incubator-Programme
- Link to the Managing Authority that commissioned the evaluation:

  www.VINNOVA.se and www.innovationsbron.se