

## **LOCAL BUSINESS WOMAN APPOINTED AS WOMEN'S ENTERPRISE AMBASSADOR**

Farnham based Lucia Bardoul, Director of Alchemy in Company has been appointed as Women's Enterprise Ambassador by the South East England Development Agency (SEEDA).

She joins a network of 100 individuals across the South East who have been recruited to act as role-models for women and to promote the benefits of being in business. This network will help raise the profile of women's enterprise and its importance to the South East economy.

The South East network forms part of a nationwide initiative featuring more than 1,000 women entrepreneurs, which was launched by Minister Margaret Hodge earlier this year.

Ambassadors are volunteers and will not receive payment for their work within the network. However, their involvement will afford them opportunities to promote their businesses and influence women's enterprise policy at local, regional and national level.

Alchemy in Company acts as a catalyst for change in business or in individual careers. For organisations, Lucia's work includes facilitating workshops and events, providing soft-skills training and running career clinics. For individuals, she focuses on career and business coaching. "One of the strengths of the Ambassador's network is its co-operative creativity – firstly we were nominated by women to join the network, then we were invited to say how we would like to provide support to women. From that came the idea to offer to speak out about businesses for women. And here we are!"

The introductory meeting of the South East Women's Enterprise Ambassadors Network took place on 25<sup>th</sup> September and was hosted by Pam Alexander, Chief Executive of SEEDA and Co-Chair of the National Women's Enterprise Taskforce.

Pam Alexander says: "Encouraging greater levels of entrepreneurship amongst women is a government priority. Men are twice as likely as women to set up their own business and women are massively under-represented among the region's

business owners. The South East Ambassador Network has been created to encourage and support new female entrepreneurs, boosting the number of women in business.”

If you would like to know more about the programme or where to get business advice, contact Helen Cook at SEEDA on 01483 500784.

-ENDS-

**Notes for Editors:**

For further information please contact Joanne Rogers or Sarah Leahy at Prowse & Company on 01372 363386. Pictures available upon request.

1. In the South East, women make up 52% of the adult population and 46% of the working population. However, only 27% of the self-employed and only about 15% of business owners are women.
2. Most of the one million self employed women in the UK are in the service sector. According to research conducted by Business Link, 88% of the majority women-owned SMEs in the South East region are in just two broad business sectors: 52% in retail and tourism and 36% in financial and business services.
3. If the UK had the same rates of female entrepreneurship as the US it would have around 750,000 more businesses.
4. If more women joined the economy, UK productivity could be boosted by up to £23 billion - 2 per cent of GDP.
5. Women-owned businesses contribute about £60 billion to the economy (Gross Value Added).
6. If women started businesses at the same rate as men, the UK would see 150,000 more businesses per annum.
7. On average, the interest rate charged on loans to female-owned businesses is 1% higher than the rate charged to male-owned businesses.