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EU project launches €2.4m competition to create ethical and sustainable wearable technologies and smart textiles

Europe-wide launch events planned prior to application deadline on 31 May 2017

A wearable technology project is offering up to €2.4 million in funding for teams of creatives and technologists to develop the next generation of sustainable wearables and e-textile ideas.

WEAR Sustain[i], a collaboration between seven organisations[ii] across Europe, launched the first of its two competition call-outs on April 1.

The program is seeking applications from teams of art, design, technology or engineering practitioners and businesses to co-develop compelling, ethical, innovative and sustainable solutions for wearable technology and e-textiles.

A total fund of €2.4m will offer 48 teams up to €50,000 each in support via innovation vouchers and with input from mentors, experts and hubs across Europe to develop prototypes and help take ideas to market.

The 48 prototypes will exemplify ethics and sustainability in wearable technology and e-textiles and will be exhibited at a final showcase event in late 2018.

Rachel Lasebikan, Senior Research and Innovation Manager at QMUL, said: "This project represents such a rare opportunity for people and businesses in different sectors to collaborate and also access real financial support and expertise in areas such as prototyping, business and venturing. We're not looking for experts in wearables but to help get great ideas off the ground and, set a benchmark for ethics and sustainability in the technology field."

WEAR Sustain's goal, in line with the European Commission's*[iv]*, is to develop best practices for future creative and technology collaborations. In addition it will create sustainable and ethical innovation methodologies for wearable technology, smart and electronic textiles.

Competition applicants must address one of seven ethics and sustainability themes such as manufacturing, waste, energy and health, as well as personal data and ethics during the development of their prototypes.

A Sustainability Strategy and free online handbook will be published at the end of the project to enable citizens, entrepreneurs and other industry stakeholders become more aware of the issues in making and using wearable technologies, and to encourage the use of recommended best practices for the future of society.

Dr Camille Baker, Reader at University of the Creative Arts, said: "Our aim is to boost synergies between technology and the arts across Europe and highlight awareness of ethics in technology, using wearables and e-textiles to explore key issues such as personal data, ethics and sustainability in current technology use. Through

this process WEAR Sustain will help pave the way towards a new generation of wearables and e-textiles that are more ethical, critical and aesthetic. "

A series of events[iii] will take place across Europe at local project hubs during the project's first Open Call to fund up to 24 teams. The competition deadline is 31 May 2017.

A second Open Call will take place in November-December 2017 to fund another 24 projects.

WEAR Sustain also invites contributions from experts, innovation hubs, suppliers and services, public agencies and municipalities, as well as investors and accelerators. All contributors are invited to join the WEAR Sustain Network and to put themselves on the map. The Network also provides insights into key trends, research data and news.

For more information, and to enter the competition or get involved, visit wearsustain.eu.

Notes to editors:

[i] WEAR is an anagram for *Wearable technologists Engage with Artists for Responsible innovation*

[ii] The project is managed by a consortium of seven organisations across five EU countries:
IMEC (Brussels, Belgium)
University for the Creative Arts (Epsom, UK)
Queen Mary University of London (UK)
Berlin University of the Arts, UdK (Berlin, Germany)
Blumine (Milan, Italy)
Digital Spaces Living Lab (Sofia, Bulgaria)
We Connect Data (Brussels, Belgium)

[iii] Open Call launch events are taking place with local project hubs in:
- Sofia, Bulgaria (31st March – 2nd April), hosted by Smart Fab Lab (SFL)
- Aarhus, Denmark (18th -20th April), hosted by the Creative Ring
- Barcelona, Spain (21st – 22nd April), hosted by the Creative Ring
- London, UK (3rd May), sponsored by Digital Catapult
- Eindhoven, the Netherlands (16th-19th May), hosted by the Creative Ring
- Brussels, Belgium (17th May) hosted by the Creative Ring

[iv] WEAR sustain is funded by the European Commission Horizon 2020 research and innovation initiative and is the current winner of the ICT-36-2016 Creativity and Sustainability topic. The EC recognises that the arts are gaining prominence as a catalyst of an efficient conversion of Science and Technology knowledge into innovative products, services and processes, and seeks to widen the exchange of skills of artists and technologists, thus creating a common language and understanding. WEAR Sustain is under the EC STARTS (S&T&ARTS) initiative, fostering innovation at the nexus of 'Science, Technology and the Arts', with which WEAR Sustain collaborates.

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