

North-West Eco Innovation Programme

B. Peace

C-Tech Innovation, UK

In 2012 C-Tech Innovation, along with their partners Lancaster University, successfully completed the delivery of their three-year “North-West Eco Innovation Programme”. Funded by the European Regional Development Fund and the North-West Development Agency, the programme helped nearly four-hundred SMEs across a broad range of sectors to rethink their products and the way they did business, through tailored one-to-one support, building on recognition of sustainability as the biggest driver for innovation, and enabling them to capitalise on the genuine opportunity that it represents. The programme successfully delivered and in many cases exceeded its metrics targets. Headlines included assistance in the development of 232 new environmental products, and carbon reductions of 28,000 tonnes.

Examples of the support delivered included:

- helping a company that specialises in high-performance coatings to understand and tackle the potential supply risks represented by their use of elements which are in finite supply
- helping a business with a retrofit building product to identify detailed design changes that would result in reduced material content, whilst maintaining structural performance, through the use of Finite Element Analysis (FEA) complemented by physical testing
- helping a business which manufactures an energy saving voltage regulation device to quantify their cradle-to-gate environmental impact, to complement their understanding of the benefits in-use and enable them to make better green claims
- helping a business develop a new kind of solar photovoltaic panel, based (unlike many existing forms of PV panel) on abundant materials, by understanding the various competing technologies, and signposting them to potential collaborators and providers of test facilities
- helping a manufacturer of hot water tanks to locate, through LCA, the environmental “hotspot” of their product, and identify strategies for making improvements
- helping a plastics recycler to generate ideas for new products that might open up new markets
- helping a developer of a novel control system for automotive hybrids to identify potential early adopters of their technology and quantify the benefits in environmental terms
- helping a construction company exploit the market opportunity represented by the launch of the “Feed-In Tariffs” scheme

For further background see www.ctechinnovation.com/eco

The support given was not merely a one-off intervention, rather it aimed to embed the thinking within the various businesses and highlighted sources of further support such as the Environmental Sustainability Knowledge Transfer Network (ES KTN; www.esktn.org), also administered by C-Tech Innovation (along with Oxford University).

Experience gained on this programme has since informed the thinking that has gone into C-Tech Innovation’s support of other programmes, including:

- Support of the Technology Strategy Board’s “New Designs for a Circular Economy” competition and the parallel “Great Recovery” programme (through C-Tech’s ongoing delivery of the ES KTN)
- Delivery of WRAP’s “REMake” voucher scheme which helped a range of Welsh SMEs to enhance their use of materials and in particular extend their use of recycled materials.

If invited to talk at Sustainable Innovation 13 the talk would feature a number of case studies selected from the above programmes, illustrating valuable lessons that can be applied within other businesses.