

A ReNEW approach to waste

By Martin Doherty, Policy Manager, ReNEW

Despite a long and painful recession in Northern Ireland there are real signs that confidence is picking up throughout all aspects of the local economy, particularly within the manufacturing sector.

Manufacturing has always had a role to play within Northern Ireland. As the nature of industry changes we have been able to move with the times in part due to the fact that the vast majority of manufacturing is made up of nimble-footed SMEs and entrepreneurs. This responsiveness will be a valuable asset if we are to embrace Circular Economy thinking.

The Circular Economy has many aspects to consider from differing financial models, such as the leasing of products, the way we produce and use energy and how we access the materials we need to produce the high quality goods that Northern Ireland sells. The materials aspect of this is one that until now has played a minor role though, within a finite planet, the emergence of economies outside of the west and growing volatility in commodities it is one that perhaps we need to spend a little more time exploring. Particularly, when reports state that the potential size of this market in the UK alone is in excess of £23bn*

Unknown to most, the ReNEW project, or 'Resource innovation Network for European Waste', has been exploring the engineering and policy implications for the Circular Economy in Northern Ireland and Europe for the past two years. ReNEW is led by researchers from the QUESTOR Centre at Queen's University Belfast, with the assistance of other notable research agencies across North West Europe. ReNEW is a €5 million project funded by the INTERREG IVB North West Europe. It has a simple yet profound purpose – to inspire and increase collaboration between research establishments, governments and businesses to create value from alternative resources and waste. ReNEW is attempting to transform the waste sector of North West Europe by improving and encouraging innovation in the recovery of valuable resources not currently captured at end-of-life.

To date the project has gained success within government circles with Environment Minister Mark H Durkan stating that ReNEW, "provides an insight into the 'art of the possible'" and, "will help in formulating future Northern Ireland strategy as we look at ways to become more sustainable in the use of our resources." There remains though a vital area for improvement and this is between the researchers, innovators and the financial sector.



The velvet mousetrap of academic grants can inhibit the commercialisation of research. If we are to exploit the true potential of the materials market in Northern Ireland we need much more dialogue with financiers to help push research into the market place and create the wealth that will fuel jobs growth and provide material security to local businesses. ReNEW will be engaging with the finance sector over the coming months to determine how to improve communication and the additional infrastructure required to ensure that the Circular Economy takes root. ■

For more information on the work of ReNEW contact Martin Doherty, ReNEW Policy Manager at martin.doherty@wrap.org.uk; tel: 028 9073 5885 or visit www.renew-network.eu

*www.green-alliance.org.uk/resources/Resource%20resilient%20UK.pdf

