

# ReNEW your thinking on materials

## FEATURE

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**T**he global economy is forecast to grow next year which is welcome news for all businesses, regardless of size. This growth figure primarily relates to an increase in financial wellbeing but is fundamentally pinned to our use of resources, even within the services sector.

Our ability to exploit natural resources has propelled the lifestyle of the ordinary person in the western world and transformed it way beyond our parents' comprehension never mind previous generations.

The increased financial wellbeing of every individual within society, even with the impacts of the recession, means that we consume materials faster than before, despite considerable improvements to recycling levels and production efficiency.

Now if we consider this im-

provement in lifestyle and accept that those within Brazil, Russia India and China (BRIC) and other emerging economies aspire for the same, then this will place a burden on future growth simply through the increased difficulty in accessing the materials that allow us to grow our economy in the traditional manner.

Therefore, whether you are at the pinnacle to the business world or a vital cog within the supply chain it will become increasingly apparent that your access to the materials that make your business tick will become difficult to source.

Many terms have been used to describe this predicament and many buzz terms have been coined as potential solutions, the latest of which is a Circular Economy.

Business leaders and owners will have to subject their current business models to the necessary scrutiny to ensure they have the resilience to fend off any shock to raw material supply

The increase in secondary material usage through improvements to recycling, and the quality of such, has opened up a new markets for many but this in itself will likely prove to be insufficient.

Hope, however, lies within the innovation excellence of Northern Ireland's businesses and its academic institutions.

Queen's University Belfast's QUESTOR centre is now leading an EU wide project called ReNEW which aims to support local businesses in helping improve their processes and boost novel processes for the extraction of high values materials from the waste stream. ReNEW - 'Resource innovation Network for European Waste' is a €5 million project funded by the Interreg IVB North West Europe scheme aiming to increase cooperation between research and business endeavours to create value from waste.

Aiming for close cooperation with industry stakeholders, ReNEW research &



innovation teams will optimise novel technologies for extracting materials from waste and their reuse in the supply chain.

ReNEW is being supported at a local government level with the Department of Environment (NI) and Belfast City Council considering the emerging policy developments required in both the waste and economic regeneration aspects of the circular economy are partners to the project.

The EC made its thinking clear on this subject through the Roadmap to a Resource Efficient Europe particularly highlighting the necessary increase in public and private investment in technological innovation.

This approach has been adopted by the UK government as evidenced in publications such as the Resource Security Action Plan and the establishment of an industry-led consortium chaired by the Green Alliance seeking to bring the circular economy to fruition.

Additionally, members of the Conservative party - known as the 2020 grouping - highlighted their proposals with respect to how the economy could grow sustainably for future generations. The conversation is happening across all sectors regardless of what side of the political debate you are on.

ReNEW also offers very tangible immediate incentives for businesses by offering vouchers to cover 50 per cent of research and innovation costs up to a maximum value of €10,000 (approx. £8,000), more detail of how to apply for the vouchers can be found at

[www.renew-network.eu/industrial-support](http://www.renew-network.eu/industrial-support).

Successful businesses will be paired with research organisations across the UK, Ireland, Germany and Belgium that best meet their technological needs.

ReNEW is also seeking your views on the needs of Research and Development infrastructure within the UK and Europe to ensure it fits the needs of the existing waste industry and the emerging resource/circular economy.

A simple questionnaire can be found on the RENEW website - [www.renew-network.eu](http://www.renew-network.eu) - that will help provide input to the debate and shape the EU and National Government policy to industrial needs.

This is your chance to get your voice heard at the highest levels in this vital area.

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