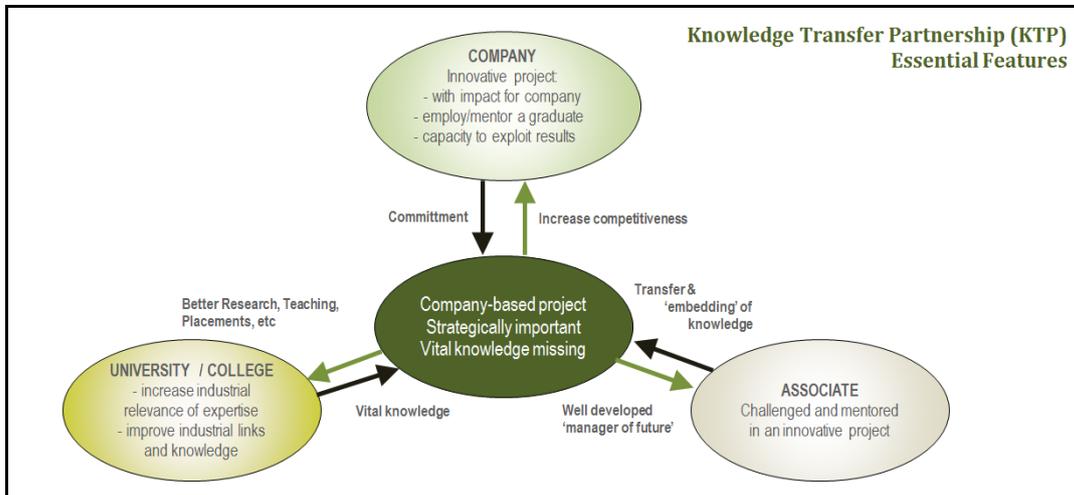


Best Practice in Innovation Support



This case study outlines how an established system for innovation support in the UK was used by Cherry Pipes, an SME in Northern Ireland, to produce a new product using recycled materials. The KTP Scheme encourages strong collaboration between companies and research organisations, and embeds new knowledge in the company.

RATIONALE

- ◆ Support innovation of an established SME
- ◆ Employ a graduate (Associate) to carry out a well-defined innovative project for the company

COMPANY REQUIREMENTS

- ◆ Develop an improved understanding of the production process for polymer compounds
- ◆ Define the precise science of how polymers behave when blended together

AIMS

- ◆ Create and develop new processes for the conversion of scrap plastic materials into a new range of products
- ◆ Manufacture high value custom blends of polymer materials to produce an optimised pipe grade HDPE

INNOVATIVE RESULTS—for the company

- ◆ Access to expert knowledge at Queen's University Belfast, including laboratories and testing facilities
- ◆ Production of coloured HDPE compounds and the optimisation of this process—allowing recycled polymers to compete with virgin polymers in the market place
- ◆ New wash plant commissioned
- ◆ Improvements in pipe material and the overall quality of the final pipe product
- ◆ Eight staff trained in new processes, including polymer blending and stock control
- ◆ New product specification data sheets created to support sales team
- ◆ New expertise in production and sales techniques embedded in the company
- ◆ Expansion of the customer base and subsequent increase in business
- ◆ Customer satisfaction levels increased
- ◆ Lead partner in a new European FP7 project (£1m)



CHALLENGES OVERCOME

- ◆ Cherry Pipes Ltd is a family business employing 25 people which needed to make changes in operation to address new markets, and faced challenges in doing so due to its small size
- ◆ The company started off making concrete pipes, and wanted to change and construct plastic pipes using recycled materials, but they had no experience with the plastic business
- ◆ The company used the KTP Scheme to gain the necessary knowledge to implement change and innovation

PROCESS

- ◆ In 2006 Cherry Pipes and the Polymer Processing Research Centre at Queen's University Belfast employed two Associates using the Knowledge Transfer Partnership scheme to develop and embed a scientific and systematic approach to innovation for the company's pipe extrusion facilities
- ◆ A new testing and analysis laboratory was set up by the first Associate to enable the company to characterise the raw material and the properties of extruded pipe products
- ◆ A new Quality System was implemented and continuously improved
- ◆ The company acquired a plastics sorting and recycling facility to ensure the supply of high quality material

LESSONS LEARNED

- ◆ All partners needed to be engaged and committed to the project (Associates, Company, University)
- ◆ A meeting at Cherry Pipes once a week ensured that everybody focused on the objectives
- ◆ Regular meetings ensured a good and close relationship between the company and the University

ABOUT KTP

- ◆ Knowledge Transfer Partnerships (KTP) is a UK-wide programme enabling businesses to improve competitiveness, productivity and performance by enhancing use of the knowledge residing in UK Higher Education Institutions.
- ◆ Further information can be obtained at www.ktponline.org



ABOUT CHERRY PIPES

Cherry Drainage Pipes is part of Cherry Plastics Group and specialises in the manufacture and distribution of plastic drainage systems to the agricultural, civil engineering and construction industries throughout the United Kingdom and Ireland.



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For further information: www.renew-network.eu