



Belfast City Council

Report to:	Development Committee
Subject:	QUESTOR Centre Management
Date:	13 October 2010
Reporting Officer:	John McGrillen, Director of Development, ext 3470
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Relevant Background Information

At the September 2010 meeting of the Development Committee, Members asked that additional information on outcomes of QUESTOR membership be provided in order to support the request to extend that membership for a further year.

QUESTOR is a membership-based environmental research cooperative led by Queen's University, Belfast (QUB). It has been operating since 1989 and provides member companies with world-class environmental research focused on their specific needs. It also provides a platform for the transfer of technology and knowledge to member organisations and for the commercial exploitation of research conducted.

The centre serves a select membership made up of environmental regulators and environmentally responsible companies, ranging in size from large multi-national corporations through to forward looking Small and Medium Sized Enterprises (SMEs). Members include BP, Exxon Mobil, Chevron North Sea Limited, Bombardier, Coca Cola Northern Ireland, Northern Ireland Water and the Northern Ireland Environment Agency.

QUESTOR's research expertise is focused on four key areas:

- Waste management and remediation
- Environmental monitoring
- Water and wastewater treatment
- Renewable energy technologies.

Key Issues

As part of Belfast City Council's work to develop the environmental industries sector in the city and to promote more sustainable business development activities, we have

been an associate member of the centre for the last two years.

This membership has allowed us to participate on the Industrial Advisory Board (IAB) – the steering group which determines the strategic direction of the annual research programme. It also allows us to represent the interests of small businesses from within Belfast as the current level of SME membership (£5,000) has proven to be quite prohibitive for those companies.

We are currently working with 6 waste management and renewable energy companies to help them identify collaborative research needs and they will be able to use QUESTOR resources to undertake that research and identify possible commercial exploitation opportunities. Additional work has been undertaken with 12 businesses across Belfast on waste, water and energy management and we are seeking to establish linkages with QUESTOR in order to pilot some research work within those businesses.

The sector is relatively under developed in Belfast at present but it is considered that there is a significant opportunity to build on the recent commercial success such as Harland and Wolff's contract to build two substations for offshore wind farms in Wales.

To set this work in context, it is envisaged that the world market for low carbon and environmental goods and services will be in the region of £3,000billion this year and growing by an estimated 5% year on year, despite the impacts of the recession. In Northern Ireland, the sector is worth £3.3billion with 1,620 businesses employing 30,600 people. It is further anticipated that the promotion of environmental technologies and the development of renewable energy will assist with addressing the impacts of the economic downturn.

At present only 1% of Northern Ireland's energy usage is provided for by indigenous renewable sources with the other 99% being imported. By 2020 at least 15% of the total UK energy consumption must come from renewable sources. More pressing locally is the target recently set by the Northern Ireland Assembly to generate 40% of our total energy consumption from renewables by 2020.

QUESTOR has been successful in the early stages of a competitive process to establish a competence centre for sustainable energy. This will provide a focal point for commercially-focused research and technological development in this field. Invest NI, who administer the programme, has awarded QUESTOR early stage funding to develop a business plan and further define the scope of the centre. The full proposal, if funded, could lead to an investment of up to £10million over a 5 year period into research into renewable energy technologies. It is understood that QUESTOR is keen to have the centre in Belfast, and has expressed a particular interest in the North Foreshore site. This would be hugely significant in terms of the potential to create and sustain high value employment opportunities in emerging technologies in Belfast. Further, the centre will be firmly focused on research with proposals requiring a compelling commercialisation plan which in turn could create new business ventures.

In order to build on the progress made to date, it is proposed that an additional one year's membership should be undertaken. In this year, the following activities would occur:

- Completion of a research and development (R&D) needs analysis of the local environmental business sector
- Convene and run one R&D Funding Seminar for the environmental business sector
- Engage 5 first time environmental innovators through assistance to secure funding for innovation and R&D to enhance their business competitiveness
- Champion one project at the Industrial Advisory Board for commercial exploitation by

local businesses

- Continue discussions with the QUESTOR Team for the development of the Competence Centre for Renewable Energies to involve industry, QUB, University of Ulster and the Agri-food & Biosciences Institute which will address critical renewable energy priorities for the Council and the city.

Resource Implications

Membership would cost £10,000 for a further year.

Recommendations

It is recommended that the Committee approves a further year's membership for the QUESTOR centre and that officers continue to sit on QUESTOR's IAB.

Decision Tracking

If recommendation is accepted, an update will be presented to a future meeting of this Committee.

Time frame: September 2011 Reporting Officer: Shirley McCay

Key Abbreviations

SME – Small to Medium Sized Enterprise

QUB – Queen's University Belfast

IAB – Industrial Advisory Board

R&D – Research and Development