

DU PONT CASE STUDY

ADVANCED MATERIALS HORIZON PANEL



Photo: Policewoman wearing DuPont Kevlar protective clothing

DR. FAHED FALLAHA

Technology Manager, Advanced Fibres Systems, Du Pont

Q. When was the company established?

A. DuPont was founded in 1802 in the USA. It is one of the world's leading companies in Science and Technology operating in more than 70 countries. DuPont offers a wide range of innovative products and services for markets including agriculture and food; building and construction; communications; safety and protection; and transportation.

Q. With outsourcing and jobs being moved to the developing world due to high labour costs- what makes DuPont remain in Northern Ireland?

A. Despite outsourcing and labour costs, the Maydown site continues to attract DuPont investment to Northern Ireland because of its excellent safety record, its flexible and highly motivated workforce and for the way in which it constantly innovates technology in order to develop and commercialise high margin, high value-adding products for the trade.

Q. How can Northern Ireland remain competitive in the increasingly globalised market?

A. This, as we all know, is probably the most important issue facing Northern Ireland, DETI and the MATRIX panel. Northern Ireland is rich in the capability of its human resources, as well as its academic and entrepreneurial talents. Its

academic position is well acknowledged globally in many fields of research.

However, to remain competitive, Northern Ireland's industrial base and the efforts of its research institutions, I believe, need to strengthen their alignment with new trends in the global economy. Technology, we all know, will continue to shape our lives and livelihoods in expected and unexpected ways. There is however, a new geographical dimension that is shaping new trends in technology and the global economy. The most influential geographical regions are China, because of its sheer size, and the Middle East and Russia because of their wealth in oil and gas reserves.

In that respect, Northern Ireland's academic and industrial institutions may learn and benefit from large global corporations. Successful corporations are establishing stronger links and more presence in China, the Middle East and Russia for example. Their R&D engines are aligned to these new influential economies, aiming to constantly generate and commercialise high margin, high value-added products.

Q. Do you work collaboratively with other companies in Northern Ireland, Ireland or GB?

A. Yes, we collaborate with other industries in all these regions and with

the main universities in the UK and Ireland. Our most recent collaboration is with companies serving oil exploration in Great Britain, but we are always seeking further opportunities to work collaboratively here in Northern Ireland.

Q. Are there any areas of research that the Northern Ireland plant is working on specifically?

A. Yes, our main R&D is currently focused on new process and new product development, aimed at creating a competitive edge for our business in the trade. This focus is sometimes described as 'small r & large D'. It is currently important for us to innovate, in order to demonstrate and reap the immediate benefits from our recently completed US\$90 millions of investment in new process technologies. Other R&D includes material recycling and energy reduction.

Q. How many people are involved in research in Northern Ireland?

A. Varies from 8 to 12.

Q. How qualified are they?

A. BSc & PhD, mainly in engineering.

Q. Do you envision increasing your investment in research over the next five years? If yes, by how much?

A. Yes, although it is difficult to say by how much at this stage. But we

do continuously seek opportunities and review human resource needs. At present, for example, we are investigating future R&D in automation and in a pilot plant, with a view for future investment in our business.

Q. What would you like to see coming out of the MATRIX panel?

A. I would like to see a permanent panel facilitated by the government, jointly chaired by industry and academia. It should aim to continuously identify and support those areas of businesses and research that are contributing or likely to contribute most to the prosperity in Northern Ireland. A longer term panel I believe is necessary, in view of new uncertainties in the world economy, energy and the global environment.

Ideally, I would like to see stronger focus on businesses that are contributing most in terms of capital invested and total value adding to Northern Ireland economy, not just in terms of number employed. Priority in research funding would also be focused on driving excellence in the selected most rewarding areas, which implies developing new criteria for assessing support and for selecting research fields.



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