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INNOVATE at Northumbria

An 'Industry Sandpit' event hosted by Northumbria on renewable energy has triggered greater research collaboration to help make electric vehicles (EVs) more affordable to a mass market.

'Innovate Low Carbon Technologies and Renewable Energy Generation' was held at Northumbria's INNOVATE hub at the Northern Design Centre in Gateshead, and ran in partnership with Newcastle, Durham and Sunderland universities. It was also attended by the respective city councils and attracted around 50 representatives from local businesses. The aim of the Innovation Sandpit was to explore new collaborative projects which would be eligible for North East Local Enterprise Partnership (NELEP) funding.

One of the initiatives that came out of the event is a research-sharing partnership between Northumbria and Sunderland University around EVs. Professor Ghanim Putrus leads the Electrical Power research group at Northumbria, which is undertaking research on creating more efficient and affordable use of batteries to drive down the cost of EVs so they are more accessible to a mass market. The team is also looking at the development of 'Smart Grid Technology' to help manage rising demand on electricity supply from a growing EV market.

Professor Putrus said: "This is a market with huge opportunities for businesses in this region, but also clear challenges which need innovative solutions. Battery costs need to come down to promote mass EV ownership, and we need to make integration of EVs on the electricity grid as smooth as possible. This is a key area of research at Northumbria, and after the Sandpit event we have found a common interest with work being undertaken by Doctor David Baglee at Sunderland University. Doctor Baglee, has already visited our laboratory and we are now looking to combine our research with some of projects he is already engaged in with organisations such as Nissan."

Doctor Baglee added: "The importance of working in partnership with Northumbria cannot be understated. It will coordinate and strengthen the region's research and development of electric vehicles, helping to promote the advancement of new and innovative technologies to deliver a wide range of projects."

Sandpits bring together industry experts and leading academics in a collaborative process to address challenges such as future energy needs. Solutions can then be created through industry-focused research groups.

Lucy Winskell, Pro-Vice Chancellor for Business and Engagement at Northumbria, said: "INNOVATE is a unique proposition offering businesses easy access to interdisciplinary teams of leading academics and our bright, energy-charged young students, all through one door and under one roof. As a hatchery for collaborative innovation, the 'Innovation Sandpits' are a key part of this offer. They provide a forum for business and industry leaders to have their challenges unpacked and defined, and real solutions developed which can then be brought to market. Bringing the right people together in this way can be incredibly creative; it's a great way of tapping into a powerful cross-university knowledge base.

“The North East is at the forefront of the low carbon and renewable energy technologies. A number of collaborative projects are now being set up following this Sandpit to help ensure the region stays ahead in this important and growing sector.”

For more information on INNOVATE and the Innovation Sandpits please contact Bruce Watson bruce.watson@northumbria.ac.uk Tel: 0191 227 4300

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