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General Information

The West Midlands Economic Strategy (WMES) identified "cluster development" as the most effective way to achieve sustainable economic development. A "cluster" is a group of companies, with a similar technology or a product, linked by specialist supply chains and a shared training, finance and research infrastructure. Usually located within a defined local area, region or county, "clusters" aim to improve competitiveness within specialist industry sectors. One such "cluster" development is in the plastics, polymers and rubber sector.

The Polymer Cluster group forms part of the Advantage West Midlands Wolverhampton-Telford Technology Corridor initiative, which aims to diversify a local industrial base heavily dependent on the automotive sector to one focusing more on high technology and high value added businesses. The key to the success of such "clusters" is the transfer of knowledge and technology between the universities, other research institutions and the private sector.

The Polymer industry is well established in Telford, Wolverhampton and the surrounding region, with a good potential to grow and to diversify. It is estimated that there are currently over 200 companies in the polymer or related industries in the sub-region. The entire sector, including rubber processing, employs some 10,000 people although numbers have been declining as low value, high volume processed products have moved to lower cost countries. It is therefore regarded as essential that companies target the higher value sectors such as building and construction, transport, food and drink, healthcare, leisure and sport with more emphasis on the use of high performance polymers and composites and new technologies.

A Polymer Cluster Centre has been established in Telford to provide support to West Midlands companies and to encourage associated companies to also make this area the base for their activities. The partners and a team of experts, based at the Polymer Cluster Centre and headed by a Polymer Champion will offer specialist advice in the following fields:

- **Polymers**
- **Polymer processing**
- **New Product Introduction**
- **Design**
- **Manufacturing**
- **New technologies**
- **Business processes**
- **Cluster Development - including Opportunities for Collaborative Ventures**
- **Supply Chain Development**
- **Environmental Issues**

The aims of the Polymer Cluster group are as follows:

1. to identify the needs of existing polymer companies
2. to help existing companies to address those needs
3. to upgrade technology within the existing business base
4. to encourage innovation
5. to facilitate, support and encourage increased research and development
6. to identify new opportunities, new products and new markets
7. to develop collaborative working practices and networking
8. to tackle current and future skills' deficiencies within the industry
9. to attract inward investment
10. to improve specialist business and professional services and supply chain linkages
11. to encourage spin-out businesses from the universities
12. to increase the expertise available to support business formation and entrepreneurship
13. provision of incubator units for new companies
14. employment safeguarding and growth
15. diversification into new sectors, for example, medical and healthcare
16. spreading best practice in terms of supply chain linkages, business processes and modern technologies

The deliverers/sources of expertise



The Innovative Product Development Centre at the University of Wolverhampton will provide a gateway to expert advice and facilities in the areas of technology, design, manufacturing and general business processes .



Rapra Technology is Europe's leading independent plastics and rubber consultancy. The company provides comprehensive technology and information services for the polymer industry and for industries, which use plastics or rubber in any component, product or production process.

polymertraining

Polymer Training Ltd is the leading training provider for the UK plastics sector. The Telford Technical Centre offers short courses in technical areas, technical support to industry, the facility of tool trialling and support for new product development.



WMG is an internationally acclaimed manufacturing group, based at the University of Warwick with further centres in China, Malaysia, India, South Africa and Thailand. It has close working relationships with over 500 global companies, continuous professional development delivered worldwide, a leading edge research programme and extensive national and regional knowledge transfer activities. WMG brings to the cluster its internationally competitive R&D capability and facilities in polymers and composites and its expertise in cluster formation.