**Top takeaways from the inaugural CEIC programme**

The Circular Economies Innovation Communities programme was a first for Wales and a collaboration between Cardiff School of Management and Swansea Business School. The programme brings together organisations from all sectors to create collaborative innovation networks for a more sustainable future.

Almost 200 participants from more than 80 organisations took part in the inaugural programme, working in teams across the Swansea Bay and Cardiff Capital regions. Together they enhanced their knowledge of the circular economy, developed their skills, and explored the potential for circular economy principles across a range of areas, including social housing, education and healthcare.

Here are some of the key lessons learned during the programme period, and consider how they can be applied to businesses and organisations throughout Wales.

**1. People are genuinely keen to learn about the circular economy**

Many of the participants began the programme with a limited understanding of the circular economy but they were nonetheless eager to learn. Excellent programme take-up reflected this surpassing our target figures reflecting the impact of Wales’ legislative landscape grows and evolves with the likes of the Wellbeing of Future Generations Act, the Single-Use Plastic Products Bill and the Net Zero Wales plan. The programme provided participants with the opportunity to deepen their knowledge of these initiatives alongside practical circular economy thinking.

*“It was a big relief to network with other people from within the local authority and wider authorities and know that I wasn’t alone in driving change” –* Swansea Bay programme participant.

**2. Empowering people with knowledge catalyses action**

Participants left the programme with both a comprehensive understanding of the circular economy, and also the capacity and capability to apply their newfound knowledge within their organisation resulting in impact such as reduced food waste and increased staff engagement in sustainability training.

*"I met with the health board sustainability lead who was really excited about CEIC, and asked if I could present to other departments in my hospital, including the sustainability steering group that presents to an exec board. The sustainability steering group shares ideas around implementing sustainability in the organisation and driving forward action” –* Swansea Bay programme participant.

**3. There are opportunities to embed circularity everywhere**

Participants learned how to engage in different aspects of circularity and how to tailor these practices to suit their specific organisational needs. Empowering participants to be active contributors in this way led to a diverse range of cleverly-considered projects, from information videos for social landlords and a ‘Green Champions’ initiative at a leisure centre, to a recruitment roadmap for health and social care guided by circular economy principles.

*"Going through the CEIC programme helped reveal a definition of what CE means in the context of my organisation, and the ways to make suggestions for change” –* CEIC Summer Conference participant.

**4. Consistent engagement keeps circularity front and centre**

Businesses are now largely aware that sustainability is no longer a ‘nice to have’, and that making meaningful progress in this area requires a complete shift in strategy. But it can be hard to keep momentum going when faced with other operational challenges. This was mirrored throughout the programme, with COVID-19, work commitments and job transitions impacting participants’ ability to keep focus on the programme.

Despite these challenges, participants remained highly involved, with an extremely high programme completion rate. Consistent engagement is critical in keeping everyone working steadily towards their shared circular economy objectives.

**5. Collaboration is key**

The CEIC programme was designed with collaboration at its core, because we know the only way Wales can transition to a sustainable and circular nation is when sectors from all industries work together to address common challenges, pool resources to drive innovation, and share learnings to fill knowledge gaps.

Engaging with others beyond their own organisational boundaries, participants were able to access a broader range of perspectives and leverage the power of diversity of thought in generating innovative solutions.

“*Collaboration is the gift of CEIC. The programme develops circular economy leaders that take back solutions to their organisations as change agents*” – Cardiff Capital programme participant.

**6. CEIC is driving transformative change throughout Wales**

Feedback from programme participants has been overwhelmingly positive: 95% agreed or strongly agreed that the CEIC programme enhanced their circular economy knowledge; 97% reported that the programme has improved their skills in innovation. More than half (53%) said that as a result of the programme, their organisation has introduced or is planning to introduce new or improved services based on circular economy principles. One Cardiff Capital participant even described the programme as ‘life changing’!

It's clear, then, that CEIC is addressing a real demand within Wales. By supporting organisations across all sectors to realise the many benefits of circular economy thinking, CEIC is enabling the collaboration and innovation needed to create a more sustainable and equitable nation for everyone.

Interested in joining the next CEIC cohort? Learn more at <https://applications.ceicwales.org.uk/application/>