



Mid & East Antrim

# Manufacturing Task Force

Autumn 2023

To find out more visit  
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MTF\_MEABC



Mid & East Antrim  
**Manufacturing  
Task Force**

The Mid & East Antrim Manufacturing Task Force (MTF) is an industry-led collaboration aimed at ensuring that Mid & East Antrim Borough has a prosperous future as the home of world class, innovative advanced manufacturing and engineering.

Established in 2018, the MTF collaboration has brought together the expertise and skills of more than 65 representatives from manufacturing companies, industry bodies, education and other sectors. It aims to support the continued growth of the sector through collaborative actions to tackle common issues.

One of the many challenges facing manufacturing businesses is the transition to Industry 4.0 technologies. It is essential that businesses explore and adopt these technologies in order to continue to improve productivity and keep the competitive edge that NI manufacturing has held for nearly half a century. Digitalisation is therefore a current and key focus of the MTF alongside CleanTech and Skills.

MTF Focus



Skills



Digitalisation



CleanTech

Key MTF objectives include:

- 1 Collectively representing the needs and interests of member firms
- 2 Supporting the creation of new and replacement jobs in the borough.
- 3 Help restore confidence and ambition within manufacturing in the borough, underpinned by an inspiring vision and drive to become the most entrepreneurial, innovative, and forward-thinking local economy in Northern Ireland.



The MTF brings together a team of manufacturing and business experts from a number of industry sectors to determine how to best capitalise on our strengths, build on our existing capabilities, deploy new technologies and maximise the opportunities from the CleanTech sector to improve manufacturing competitiveness.

Graham Whitehurst,  
Chair of MTF



Why join the MTF?

- Be part of the effort to support the manufacturing and engineering sectors in Mid & East Antrim;
- Collaborate with other companies to address shared challenges and investigate joint opportunities;
- Opportunity to grow your business through programmes and funding support;
- Be first in line to benefit from new skills initiatives and have access to talent;
- Ability to influence the direction and priorities of the MTF to align with your business requirements;
- Opportunity to learn about and participate in larger strategic projects such as Belfast Region City Deal and current CleanTech initiatives including the Hydrogen Training Academy.

Focus for 2023-24

- Member companies accessing digital transformation support programmes;
- NI Government approval for the i4C Innovation & CleanTech Centre funded under the Belfast Region City Deal initiative to proceed;
- Approval for the Hytech NI hydrogen economy project and test-beds in MEA obtained;
- Continuation and development of Phase 2 of the Collaborative Growth Network for CleanTech; and
- Successful delivery of a range of Skills Academies;
- Continued development of activity and initiatives that support local industry.



The Manufacturing Task Force has been the catalyst to bring together our local businesses, in a structured and mutually beneficial way, to work collaboratively, it provides excellent industry support.

Wilbert Moore  
Managing Director  
Moore Concrete





# MTF Structure

## Steering Team

The MTF is industry led with an experienced industry chair. It is driven by a collaborative steering team which meet quarterly.

Purpose;



Provides direction, governance and oversight of sub group activity;



Leads on supporting strategic projects such as Belfast Region City Deal, plans for the i4C Innovation and CleanTech Centre, Ballymena and CleanTech initiatives such as the Hydrogen Training Academy and Hydrogen Test Beds projects.

## There are three active subgroups

The subgroups are tasked with focusing on the delivery of the strategic action plans aligned with the three priority focus areas;



Skills



Digitalisation



CleanTech



### Skills

#### Purpose

- Support upskilling and reskilling programmes to address company needs directly;
- Promote manufacturing and engineering as a career;
- Support skills academy establishment and new course development.

#### Activity

- Commissioned local skills survey and salary survey to inform industry requirements;
- Range of Apprenticeship events organised during Apprenticeship week to promote opportunities in the Borough;
- Prof Brian Cox Science Summer School, first of its kind in Northern Ireland;
- Secured £25K from Invest NI for a Collaborative Growth Programme to address shared skills requirements;
- Development of a Mid & East Antrim Labour Market Partnership Action Plan;
- Development of a range of Academies, including Manufacturing, Welding, Transport;
- Providing a range of employment opportunities to those with barriers to employment.



### Digitalisation

#### Purpose

- Develop company understanding of Industry 4.0 principles and technologies to increase competitiveness;
- Explore ways to collaboratively increase productivity in local companies.

#### Activity

- MTF Companies are currently progressing with projects under the Smart Manufacturing Data Hub (SMDH) project, facilitated by Digital experts from Ulster University. This is a £50m UK funded data innovation hub for manufacturers to accelerate digital technologies in their companies.
- Ryobi hosted a digitalisation visit for MTF companies, with a focus on robotics and automation.
- In partnership with Mid & East Antrim Borough Council, Invest NI delivered workshops with a focus on improving operational efficiencies, with experienced Lean, Six Sigma and Supply Chain practitioners on hand.



### CleanTech

#### Purpose

- To capitalise on the strengths in energy / CleanTech in Mid & East Antrim and seize on the opportunities afforded by the transition to net zero; and
- Developing a plan of action to develop the clean technology capability of businesses in Mid & East Antrim aligned to key investments such as the i4C Innovation and CleanTech Centre (£24m) and Hytech NI project (£20m).

#### Activity

- Build on the scoping phase of the SME led CleanTech Collaborative Growth Network (CGN) in 2022/23 and secure InvestNI funding for a second phase CGN support package worth up to £170,000.
- MTF members undertook carbon literacy training and are progressing their ESG strategy plans (Environmental, social, and corporate governance) that include Scope 1, 2 and 3 reporting requirements as part of this collaboration. Extra funding support was provided by the Michelin Development Fund.
- Council are delivering a 2-year programme of support from July 2023 under the Innovate UK Fast Followers programme, employing a full-time Net Zero Innovation and Delivery Manager to share knowledge and support practical net zero initiatives for industry.
- Expand on the successful pilot phase of Hydrogen Training Academy (2022-23) by integrating it into the future green hydrogen production / skills training facility at the ECOS hub in Ballymena funded under the Hytech NI project.
- Support the continuing development of industry led initiatives such as Kilroot Energy Park, Ballylumford Power to X and Wrightbus hydrogen production facility amongst others.



### MTF Achievements

- Membership of 40+ companies representing over 8,000 employees in the Borough, additional 25 key stakeholder MTF Member Companies;
- £500,000 in-kind time contribution from MTF Members;
- Secured external funding of £800,000 for collaborative projects & training programmes since 2020;
- Over £30m funding secured in principle for CleanTech and innovation initiatives through the Northern Ireland Complimentary Fund and Belfast Region City Deal;
- Providing skills for our companies through Transport, Welding, Manufacturing academies, almost 50 people gaining employment to date as a result of these academies;
- Promoting and growing apprenticeships across Member companies.

CleanTech (GreenTech) involves the use of technology to make positive environmental impacts or reduce negative environmental impacts. This covers a broad range of activity and processes from reducing CO2 emissions, renewable power generation, minimising waste-streams to preserving water quality.



# Creating Collaborative Solutions



## Focus on Supply Chain

### BuySupplyNI.com – helping to make the Connections to Buy Local

The industry need for development of a local supply chain was initially identified by the companies within the MTF. A core group of large companies and SMEs came together to create an online, easily accessible portal to match local buyers and suppliers within the manufacturing, engineering and construction sector. This is a Northern Ireland wide no cost to companies initiative, operating across all Council areas.

By registering on [buysupplyni.com](http://buysupplyni.com), buyers and suppliers have instant access to a wider local market for much needed components, many of which have currently been impacted by supply chain issues. BuySupplyNI can give your business added advantages including reduced costs of sourcing materials and components; reduced lead times for the delivery of finished goods; a greater ability to manage and communicate with suppliers whilst helping meet zero carbon targets as components made and sourced locally have a shorter distance to travel.

Visit [www.buysupplyni.com](http://www.buysupplyni.com) to register or email [buysupplyni@midandeastantrim.gov.uk](mailto:buysupplyni@midandeastantrim.gov.uk) or telephone **028 2563 3345** for more information.



## Focus on Skills

Mid and East Antrim Borough Council are focused on developing initiatives in collaboration with employers in the Borough to meet current skills needs.

### The Labour Market Partnership (LMP)

This a province-wide approach developed by the Department for Communities with the aim to address issues with jobs and training by combining resources and delivering a collaborative and flexible approach to employability support.

Mid & East Antrim's LMP have a number of programmes and initiatives planned for the year ahead including:

- Employment and Skills Academies - Transport Academy, Hospitality/ Tourism Academy, Manufacturing Academy (Electricians Aid) Construction Academy • Mid & East Antrim Enterprise Pathway; • Work Connections; • Women Returners Programme; • Childminding Academy; • Graduate Disability Academy; • Classroom Assistant; • Women into Non Traditional Skills and Flex.

For more information on upcoming programmes visit: [www.midandeastantrim.gov.uk/LMP](http://www.midandeastantrim.gov.uk/LMP)

## Current Skills Academies include:

### Manufacturing Academy - Autumn 2023

A pilot Manufacturing Academy was initiated by the MTF as a result of a need identified by member companies to attract new employees into the sector given the number of vacancies.

Council worked closely with Northern Regional College and MTF members to plan and deliver a first cohort of the course in Ballymena during 2021, a second cohort in 2022 and a third cohort in 2023 .

A similar pilot Manufacturing Academy for companies outside Ballymena, funded by Council has been implemented.



## NI Science Summer School, 23 January 2024

'Making Sense of Science', aims to encourage curiosity, inspire the next generation of local talent and future workforce and raise the importance of Science, Technology, Engineering, Arts and Maths (STEAM) activities with young people and their parents. This initiative was established in 2012 at St. Paul's Way Trust School in east London by Lord Andrew Mawson OBE and Professor Brian Cox CBE, and the project is now expanding nationally with the aim to 'make the UK the best place to do science'.

Mid & East Antrim Borough Council are bringing world-leading STEM academic and industry leaders to inspire and activate the curiosity of the student attendees at Science Summer School NI in January 2024, with guest presenter Professor Brian Cox CBE in attendance. The Science Summer School is not a stand-alone event but is a catalyst for a collaborative vision for the borough to nurture future talent, through a series of engagement activities between schools and companies.



Programme Sponsors include **Kilwaughter Minerals Ltd., Ryobi Aluminium Casting (UK) Ltd., IPC Mouldings, Terumo Blood & Cell Technologies, Michelin Development, Yelo and Caterpillar**. The sponsor businesses are contributing to a broad variety of school engagement activities throughout the year and in the lead in to the main even in January. These opportunities help forge education to employment relations and ensure that the pipeline of skills and talent remains in the borough. Activities include site visits to showcase roles available and learn about career pathway opportunities as well as Work Experience Events and engaging workshops.





If you are interested in learning more about the Manufacturing Task Force or if you would like to become involved in the Steering group, Skills, Digitalisation or CleanTech subgroups, please contact

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