

Bio Base NWE evaluation for establishing the Bio-innovation Summer school as a self-supporting annual event

1. Observations collected shortly after the summer school

The Bio Base NWE summer school was co-organized by the Irish Technology Centre for Biorefining & Bioenergy (TCBB) (IRL) with the Ghent Biobased Economy Summer School, an annual event that is running since 2012. The bullet points below reflect the feedback received directly and noted at the time of the summer school:

- Certainly, it was a good concept to inter-link with Ghent University (BE) and its existing framework for its week-long summer school – there were clear synergies there as the provision of the Bio-Innovation Summer School enhanced what it had to offer its own participants in 2014.
- Prof Tom Desmet (UGent, BE), organizer of the summer school, reflected during discussion with him in Ghent that being able to bring in the TCBB-Ireland day / Bio-Innovation Summer School gave Ghent University an opportunity to bring something new and different into the framework of their now annual, week-long summer school. At the time Prof Desmet indicated that for 2015 they were looking at the possibility of running the summer school in Brazil.
- TCBB researchers who attended the full week's event reflected to me directly that they found the opportunity to visit and view Bio Base Europe Pilot Plant (especially given its scale) at first hand very useful. One such researcher reported that he got an opportunity for a more focused visit earlier in the week than the scheduled group visit on Wednesday 27 August 2014.
- In terms of companies, the core purpose of the TCBB (industry-led collaboration), it was valuable to get some direct contacts in some pharma-chemical companies – the event helped to foster direct human interaction and to develop some meaningful, identifiable contact points – key examples being Novasep and DuPont –these contacts were used shortly afterwards by TCBB to build possible involvement in funding proposals and develop further contacts.
- TCBB industry member and guest speaker, Mr Michael Murray, Managing Director of NVP Energy was in a position to schedule a number of meetings for himself with industry around the Ghent area. The event was an opportunity for him to showcase NVP Energy's capacities to a wider audience.
- The summer school also created the opportunity to facilitate direct face-to-face meetings between the Dutch company Attero (Dr Adrie Weeken) and the TCBB (IRL).
- The fostering of contacts between TCBB researchers and researchers from other European Union institutes is very valuable - sharing of knowledge and contacts made through that could benefit the TCBB network in the future. Of course, the networking between TCBB and other BioBase NWE project partners such as the NNFC in England and Bio Base Europe Pilot Plant (BE) is invaluable.

2. Strengths and weaknesses in terms of running the Summer school as an annual event

In terms of the Bio Base NWE project, one of the aims of the Bio-Innovation Summer School was to identify strengths and weaknesses in terms of running this as an annual event. In terms of strengths, these are reflected above and can be summarised as:

Strengths

- (i) the opportunity for meaningful networking between bio-based industrial researchers and the academic investigators and researchers
- (ii) the opportunity for building long-term linkages between industry, researchers and institutions across EU member states in the North West Europe region
- (iii) the opportunity for learning through site visits to leading edge facilities available in one region and not in another and (iv) leveraging items (i), (ii) and (iii) for future collaborations between researchers, institutions and SMEs across EU member states

Weakness

The identified weaknesses are

- (i) the challenge of enabling the Bio-Innovation Summer School to become self-sustaining in the near term so that it could cover its own annual funding and running costs
- (ii) to become an established part of the bio-based calendar
- (iii) another challenge is to provide meaningful site visits within the programme to facilities operating at a commercial scale, such as the model facilities at Bio Base Europe Pilot Plant

Organizing a summer school is an intensive process. The risk exists that there will be not enough participants to cover the costs. This risks arises when the program is not attractive, or when the summer school announcement is not sufficiently picked up. A possibility could be that a Biobased Summer School could be hosted in a different region every second year and partner with a more established event such as the Ghent University Summer School.

3. Conclusion

Organizing a summer school is an intensive process. It is therefore a better idea to join forces with established summer schools: instead of organizing and trying to establish a Bio Base NWE summer school as an annual event, it is a better strategy to team up with existing biobased economy summer schools such as the Ghent Biobased Economy Summer School. This joint Summer School could be hosted in a different region e.g. every second year. This will allow for expansion of the range and quality of the network and have an attractive program every year, due to a larger pool of quality speakers and development of a positive feedback loop.