**Celtic Freeport Innovation working invite**

**Invitation to join Celtic Freeport Company Limited Innovation Working Group**

***Innovation Working Group members sought to support the development of innovation in the Celtic Freeport’s target sectors***

The Celtic Freeport Company Limited (CFCL or Celtic Freeport) is seeking members for a dedicated Freeport Innovation Group (The Innovation Group). The Innovation Group will ensure the outputs of the Celtic Freeport lead to creating an innovative ecosystem and opportunities for businesses and organisations of all sizes.

The Celtic Freeport Innovation Group requires representation from a broad range of skills experts, sector-leading employers, skills delivery agents and advocates of learners from disadvantaged backgrounds from across South and West Wales. Members of the Innovation Group will partake in meetings that will produce advisory policy on skills for the consideration for the CFCL Board, this policy will shape the skills environment of our region for the foreseeable future.

This is an opportunity for those with expert knowledge in Innovation and in specialties relating to the Celtic Freeport’s target sectors as well as local and regional businesses of all sizes in those target sectors.

The Celtic Freeport was chosen by both the Welsh and UK Governments to become one of two freeports in Wales. The bid was submitted by the Celtic Freeport consortium made up of Pembrokeshire County Council, Neath Port Talbot County Borough Council, Associated British Ports and the Port of Milford Haven, the Founding Members. The Celtic Freeport will bring significant benefits to its immediate region, wider South Wales and Wales and the UK as a whole. Freeport incentives include non-domestic rates and national insurance relief on tax site land and customs benefits for customs sites, interventions that are designed to drive investment and growth across the target sectors on floating offshore wind, hydrogen, advanced manufacturing and sustainable fuels, supporting over 16,000 jobs.

**Freeport’s and Innovation**

The Welsh and UK Governments see freeports as forming a key part of the UK’s innovation ecosystem and require a detailed innovation plan to be developed as part of the business case process. The Celtic Freeport has submitted its Outline Business Case (OBC). The OBC is expected to be approved in spring 2024. The Full Business Case (FBC) will be developed concurrently with the final phase of the OBC approval with submission anticipated in summer 2024. The OBC and FBC guidelines on skills in included at Appendix 1 of this document.

Celtic Freeport wishes that its Innovation Group is fully involved in the development of the FBC skills plan ahead of the plan being approved by the Celtic Freeport Board, as part of the approval of the FBC.

The Innovation Group will support the development and delivery of the skills plan through a number of different initiatives which is anticipated to include:

• Working closely with our stakeholders including private sector partners, universities, UKRI, Catapults, Councils and Welsh and UK Government

• Promoting and supporting collaboration between local stakeholder and industry on the development of a innovation ecosystem

• Developing the Innovation proposition of the Celtic Freeport as the Freeport matures, with particular focusses on floating offshore wind manufacture and maintenance, hydrogen production / utilisation, advanced manufacturing and sustainable fuels

• Establishment of innovation incubators

• Outreach to local companies of all sizes that are looking to innovate

• Provide technical and expert advice to the Celtic Freeport Board with respect to Innovation

• Advise how the Celtic Freeport will build on / amplify / complement, etc, existing innovation programmes and the local Innovation ecosystem

• Consider areas of cross over to other work streams such as Skills and Trade and Investment

Celtic Freeport, through its fulltime resourcing, anticipates providing secretariat support to the Skills Group.

**Application process**

Those interested in applying to join the Celtic Freeport Innovation Group should fill in an Expression of Interest form which is available to download at <https://www.celticfreeport.wales/celtic-freeport-seeks-specialist-innovation-and-skills-input-to-deliver-green-investment-vision/> and include a covering letter of no more than two pages indicating their expertise for the role. The applications for the Innovation Group opens on the 8th February 2024 and closes at midnight of the 28th February 2024.

The Founding Members of the Celtic Freeport will assess all applications and it is intended that candidates will be informed of the outcome of their application by the end of February 2024. The Innovation Group is anticipated to hold its initial meeting in March 2024.

At its initial meeting, the Innovation Group will elect a Chair and adopt its Terms of Reference.

If this role is of interest to you please visit <https://www.celticfreeport.wales/celtic-freeport-seeks-specialist-innovation-and-skills-input-to-deliver-green-investment-vision/> to find out more or download an expression of interest form. For an informal conversation about this role, please contact the interim Celtic Freeport Innovation lead Ieuan.rees@pembrokeshire.gov.uk or David Gwynne, Interim CEO of the Celtic Freeport david.gwynne@eurusconsulting.com

**Annex 1: UK and Welsh Government Freeport set up guidance.**

10. Innovation

10.1 Purpose and Scope

10.1.1 Creating an innovative ecosystem within Freeports is key to achieving the objectives of the Freeport Programme in Wales. Freeports should be dynamic environments that bring together the innovation eco-system to collaborate in new ways, while offering spaces to develop and trial new ideas and technologies.

10.1.2 Innovation is also the cornerstone of sustained economic growth in industry. It allows business to develop and adapt. Supporting the capacity of business within Freeports to invest in R&D, including developing the necessary local skills, will be key to the growth of sectoral clusters targeted by Freeports and ultimately this will also lead to local job creation.

10.1.3 Furthermore, to meet Net Zero targets unprecedented innovation will be required. Freeports have a key role to play in driving the transition of port operations and port-adjacent manufacturing towards decarbonisation and Net Zero, supporting the development and adoption of low carbon technologies within the port environment and beyond.

10.1.4 The Innovation Strategy for Wales sets out the Welsh Government’s plan to create and nurture a vibrant innovation culture for a stronger, fairer, greener Wales. It seeks to use innovation to deliver impact and value for citizens in a modern Welsh economy by coordinating people, and organisations such as business and academia and funding bodies to maximise outcomes and investment from Welsh, UK and international sources. The aims are grouped into four specific missions: for Education, the Economy, Health and Wellbeing, and Climate and Nature. An Action Plan will be published in due course which will set out the mission goals to be taken forward against each of these missions.

10.2 Implementation

10.2.1 Freeport innovation strategies should complement, and add value to, the current innovation ecosystem and focus private and public-sector investment in research and development. They should also demonstrate alignment with existing regional and national innovation priorities and strategies, including the Welsh Government’s Innovation Strategy for Wales, UK Government’s R&D Roadmap, Innovation Strategy and the Science and Technology Framework

10.2.2 It is important that Freeports are also connected to, and complement, existing innovation support mechanisms and should consider how their innovation activity can be linked to and draw in support from national (Welsh and UK) innovation support systems. The Welsh Government Business Innovation Team can support brokerage with such mechanisms. These can include:

• innovate UK and the funding and business support it offers;

• existing Wales based City & Growth Deals;

• the Welsh Government and its partners who provide a wide range of innovation funding and support across Wales;

• our university and college sectors who are vital parts of our national innovation system, engaging with, developing and translating new knowledge into the economy;

• innovation Centres, research centres and innovation assets which support companies with product, process and productivity challenges; and

• innovative local businesses.

10.2.3 All Freeport partners should seek opportunities to access wider innovation funding and support, examples of which are set out below and should identify a pipeline of complimentary investment opportunities in and around the Freeport geography that have the potential to support the Freeport to realise its innovation objectives.

10.2.4 The governments also expect Freeports, through their approaches to tax site management (see Section 5.1 above), actively to encourage investment into tax sites that have high innovation and research and development potential.

10.2.5 The governments will support Freeports’ innovation ambitions including through:

• strategic advice – the governments will: promote funding and support opportunities to Freeports; provide access to relevant teams across both governments; support the development and delivery of Freeports’ innovation strategies and communications plans; and provide sector-specific advice and information; and

• the FREN – Freeports will have access to the Freeports Regulation Engagement Network (FREN). The FREN is a network of Freeports and regulators, facilitated by the Department for Science, Innovation and Technology. The FREN operates where there is a clear regulatory barrier to innovation and will aim to provide a channel for Freeport governing bodies to engage with regulators. It aims to help firms operating in Freeports to overcome the regulatory challenges of developing, testing and applying new ideas and technologies. FREN exists to promote opportunities for innovation. It will look to share best practices and lessons learned on enabling innovation through regulation across Freeports and provide support on regulatory issues, by sharing guidance and existing best practices. Where appropriate, it will seek to work with regulators and establish new regulatory flexibilities to promote the development of new technologies.

10.2.6 Innovate UK’s Manager for Wales will be able to provide an ongoing connection between Innovate UK and Welsh Freeports leadership. This may include supporting initiatives and activities that will inspire innovation within Welsh Freeports and upskilling the Welsh Freeports where necessary to connect them

to existing innovation networks and support e.g., Freeport Innovation Network, Innovate UK - KTN, Innovate UK EDGE and Catapults.

10.2.7 Freeports and the businesses within them, who will play a critical role in the innovation ecosystem of the Freeport, may also take advantage of the existing innovation support available through both governments. This includes, but is not limited to:

• the Business Wales Innovation zone which has been designed to enable businesses find out what support and funding is available to help them innovate. The Welsh Government Innovation Specialist function can help and support relevant applications via the WG SMART Flexible Innovation Support (FIS) funding scheme. UKRI’s website outlines current UKRI funding opportunities. Freeports should review current UK Government guidance on how to apply for innovation funding. Freeports may also be eligible for other, non-UKRI government funding innovation programmes;

• the Innovate UK Knowledge Transfer Network (KTN) is a key delivery partner of Innovate UK and UKRI, providing a unique capability in the UK to support innovation collaboration across business sectors and throughout the UK. The Innovate UK KTN supports collaboration between innovative businesses seeking to connect with partners, customers, suppliers, and the research base in order for them to grow. Some ambitious and innovative SMEs within the Freeport may also qualify for support from Innovate UKEDGE , which complements Innovate UK project funding with intensive, specialist-led support for ambitious businesses, providing them with the leadership and management skills they require to scale-up, commercialise, access new markets, and internationalise; and

• the Innovation Hub, established in collaboration between Innovate UK and the British Business Bank, aims to reduce complexity. It can be used to identify available innovation funding and support, including Innovate UK funding for businesses to help them commercialise their ideas.