



# InnovateUs Mentoring Programme

for Northern Ireland Businesses

**2026-27**



Department for the

**Economy**

An Roinn

**Geilleagair**

[www.economy-ni.gov.uk](http://www.economy-ni.gov.uk)

# Meet the Team

Our experienced team can answer all your questions.



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# InnovateUs

SERC has a wide range of academic expertise across multiple sectors.

**Do you have an innovative idea for your business, but require assistance to make it a reality? If so, then the InnovateUs programme is here to help.**

SERC has a wide range of academic expertise available across multiple sectors to help companies in Northern Ireland bring new ideas and concepts into their business in a very bespoke fashion.

## **Fully funded by Department for the Economy (DfE)**

Up to 60 hours bespoke mentoring delivered onsite or online.

Skills enhancement, in the sphere of innovation and development.

## **Eligibility criteria**

Registered business, sole trader, social enterprise or charity, based in

Northern Ireland \*As of April '26 charities can avail of InnovateUs support, on the condition that they have a commercial or business function.

- Less than 50 employees
- Not a community group
- Project cannot be generic support for business start-up or standard training/upskilling or business development
- Project cannot cover training that has already been funded via another government or publicly funded programme

We are always open to new innovations, so if you have an idea that is not listed please get in touch and we will happily discuss it, or signpost to a relevant stakeholder.

# Engineering

## Projects we have previously completed:

- CAD (including but not limited to SolidWorks and Fusion360)
- CNC Machining (CAM)
- 3D Printing (Rapid Prototyping)
- PCB Design
- Electrical Control Wiring
- Pneumatic & Electro Pneumatic Design
- Arduino Programming
- SIEMENS PLC Programming & Hardware Wiring
- Electronic Schematics
- FEA (Finite Element Analysis)

Please come to us with your unique ideas for engineering projects outside of this list

## Case Study - CAM/CNC

### 01 MK Wood Designs

#### Business Profile

MK Wood Designs is a relatively new business, based in Belfast. The company specialise in van to campervan conversions. MK Wood make bespoke conversion kits, panels and flooring as well as and associated furnishings and products for their clients to transform their vans into fully functional campervans.

#### The Brief

MK Wood Designs first contacted SERC in November 2024 in order to upskill in Computer Aided Design (CAD), to help innovate their product offering and product design process within the business.

Following on from that particular intervention, it was then identified that SERC could mentor the business in CAM/CNC. The business had recently purchased CNC machinery and a lathe and wanted to know how to use it to best effect and to be able to programme it using CAM Software. This would enable the business to transform the manufacturing processes used and increase productivity, efficiency and ultimately sales.

#### The Solution

This business was allocated 30 hours of mentoring with one of SERC's Engineering Training Consultants with a manufacturing engineering and CAD design background. Time was spent transferring knowledge and skills on using Autodesk Fusion software. Specifically the business was mentored in CAM/CNC, 2D and 3D Milling Operations, Workholding and Fixtures, Post Processing and how to export Gcode.

#### The Impact

Through the project, the business has expanded their product offering and transformed the design and manufacturing processes within the business. MK Wood Designs has since continued on their innovation journey by learning about Finite Element Analysis (FEA) in order to ensure that their products could undergo stress testing simulation to ensure they were robust and fit for purpose.

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*Engagement with SERC's Business Support team through the InnovateUs programme has made a significant positive impact in our business, MK Wood Designs. The expert guidance provided by our mentors Ryan Graham and Michael McGoldrick in the use of Autodesk Fusion CAD/CAM software has enabled us to produce well engineered designs for van fit-out including brand new modular camper van conversion kits, as well as making effective use of CNC wood machining equipment in which the business has invested*

**Mark Campbell**  
**MK Wood Designs**

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# Digital

## Projects we have previously completed:

- E-commerce Integration
- Asset Control
- Online Booking Systems
- Virtual Learning Environment
- Immersive Technologies (AR, VR, & Drone Technology)
- CRM Implementation
- App Integration
- Process Automation
- AI
- Videography

Please come to us with your unique ideas for digital projects outside of this list

## Case Study - E-commerce

### 02 Chloco Ltd

#### Business Profile

Chloco, a beauty salon, based in Bangor, is an award-winning skincare and aesthetics business founded by Chloë McAnirn. The salon is recognised for its results-driven facial treatments, personalised client experience, and commitment to excellence in advanced skin health.

#### The Brief

As the business grew, Chloë identified the need to diversify income streams and reduce reliance on in-salon appointments. Periods of reduced capacity, including holidays, sickness, and quieter trading times, highlighted the importance of building a more resilient and flexible model.

Chloë approached the InnovateUs programme to explore how e-commerce could support business growth. The ambition was to extend the salon experience beyond physical treatments, allowing clients to continue their skincare journey at home while also reaching new customers outside the local area.

#### The Solution

The Bespoke e-commerce InnovateUs project focused on developing an online retail offering for salon-recommended products, creating a seamless connection between in-salon treatments and at-home care. A key element was introducing a “no-pressure” sales approach, giving clients the flexibility to purchase products online at their convenience following appointments. Chloë gained valuable insight into both the technical and commercial aspects of e-commerce, ensuring a solution that supported long-term sustainability.

#### The Impact

The introduction of e-commerce has transformed how Chloco engages with both existing and new customers. Key outcomes include diversified revenue streams, improving financial stability during quieter periods or unexpected closures, and expanded market reach beyond the local area. Customers can now access high-quality, salon-approved products regardless of location, enhancing accessibility and convenience.

The platform has also increased customer retention and loyalty, enabling clients to maintain their skincare routines at home using trusted products. By removing in-salon sales pressure, Chloë’s business has enhanced the overall customer experience while still creating strong opportunities for follow-up purchases. Looking ahead, Chloë plans to introduce subscription services next.

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*The mentorship and support I received through SERC have been invaluable. While I know how to deliver beautiful results for my clients, the InnovateUs programme helped me understand the technology and systems behind the scenes. Being connected with my mentor, Allan, gave me the skills and confidence to grow my business through innovation, particularly by introducing eCommerce and creating new ways for clients to engage with my brand.*

**Chloë McAnirn**  
**Founder, Chloco Ltd**

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# Food

## Projects we have previously completed:

- Food Technology & Recipe Development
- Food Formulation
- Raw Materials Sourcing & Pricing
- Packaging & Labelling
- Diet & Nutrition
- Processing
- Food Manufacturing
- Quality Control & Traceability Systems
- Auditing for Continuous Development
- Sensory Analysis
- Menu Engineering & Menu Development
- Yield & Cost Management

Please come to us with your unique ideas for food projects outside of this list

## Case Study - Recipe Development

### 03 Love My Bake

#### Business Profile

Gemma is the owner of Love My Bake, a business specialising in home-made desserts. Based in Belfast, Gemma combines her passion for baking, teaching, and nutrition to create innovative dessert offerings. She currently delivers classes in gardening and culinary arts.

#### The Brief

Through her interest in fitness and nutrition, Gemma identified a clear gap in the market for healthier dessert options. Her research showed that many consumers aiming to improve their diet were avoiding traditional desserts due to their high

calorie and sugar content. Gemma wanted to develop alternatives that retained the indulgent flavours and textures customers expect, while offering improved nutritional value such as reduced calories, lower sugar and increased protein.

#### The Solution

Gemma was matched with SERC Hospitality Lecturer, Ian Thompson, who brought extensive experience in baking and pastry development. The project focused on reformulating traditional desserts using alternative ingredients and methods to reduce sugar and calorie content while maintaining taste, texture, and visual appeal. This included testing, recipe refinement, and nutritional profiling to ensure consistency and quality.

#### The Impact

Through the project, Gemma successfully developed two signature low-calorie desserts, sticky toffee pudding and chocolate fudge cake. The chocolate fudge cake, in particular, demonstrates the innovation achieved, containing approximately 200 kcal per portion, 13g of protein and only 3.4g of sugar, compared to typical shop-bought equivalents which can range from 350–500 kcal per portion.

These products offer consumers a healthier alternative without compromising on flavour, positioning Love My Bake within a growing market for nutritionally enhanced treats. The project has strengthened Gemma's product range, increased her confidence in innovation, and created strong potential for future business growth and product expansion.

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*The InnovateUs programme has been incredibly valuable to my business. The mentoring and advice I received gave me the confidence and technical knowledge to develop products that not only taste great but also meet the growing demand for healthier options. Working alongside Ian allowed me to refine my ideas and bring them to a professional standard that I wouldn't have achieved on my own.*

**Gemma Diamond**  
**Love My Bake**

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# Construction & Renewables

## Projects we have previously completed:

- Smart Home Technologies
- Understanding Smart Controls & Connectivity to Reduce Energy Consumption
- Resource Mitigation Techniques/Fluid Leak Detection
- Modern Techniques for Pipe Sizing within Domestic Properties
- Thermal Dynamics & Stored Domestic Hot Water, Non-Carbon Fuel Generated
- ATES: Aquifer Thermal Energy Storage
- HVO & Bio Oils
- Bio LPG (Gas)
- Power Flushing
- De-centralising of Heating
- Carbon reducing pipe work techniques: Electro Fusion Welding & Crimp methods
- Hybrid Heat Pumps

Please come to us with your unique ideas for construction projects outside of this list

## Case Study - Hybrid Heat Pumps

### 04 Richard Dunbar Plumbing, Heating & Joinery

#### Business Profile

Richard's Plumbing, Heating & Joinery business, based in County Down, provides a wide range of services across domestic plumbing, heating systems, building work and joinery.

#### The Brief

With increasing demand for more energy-efficient and environmentally sustainable heating solutions, Richard recognised the need to future-proof his business. He wanted to expand his knowledge of emerging technologies such as smart heating controls and heat pumps to remain competitive in a rapidly evolving industry. While attending a gas course at SERC's Professional Skills Centre, Richard approached the tutor about the InnovateUs programme as he had an interest in gaining specialist insight into these new systems and to explore how they could be integrated into his existing service offering.

#### The Solution

Richard undertook a tailored InnovateUs mentoring project focused on renewable heating technologies and smart system integration. He was matched with Michael, a highly experienced tutor with extensive industry and teaching expertise. Through one-to-one mentoring, Richard developed knowledge and practical understanding of smart heating controls, system optimisation, and the principles underpinning heat pump technology. The project explored how these innovations can improve energy efficiency, enhance customer control, and support the transition to low-carbon heating solutions.

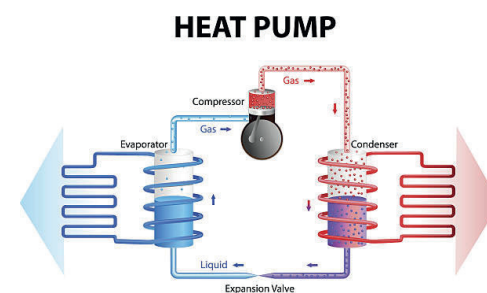
#### The Impact

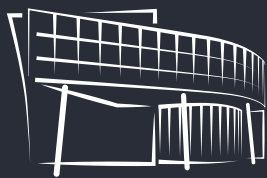
As a result of the mentoring project, Richard has strengthened his ability to offer forward-thinking, energy-efficient solutions to his customers. He is now better equipped to advise on and install smart heating systems and has a clear pathway towards incorporating heat pump technologies into his services. This diversification positions his business to respond to growing market demand for sustainable heating options, ensuring it remains competitive and adaptable within the industry. The project has also increased Richard's confidence to embrace innovation and plan for future developments within the renewables sector.



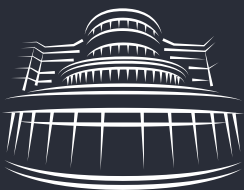
*The mentoring has given me the knowledge and confidence to look at new technologies and expand my services. I now feel better prepared for the future of the heating industry and the move towards more sustainable solutions.*

**Richard Dunbar**  
**Richard Dunbar Plumbing,**  
**Heating & Joinery**

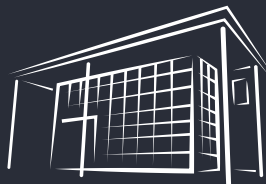




Bangor SPACE Campus



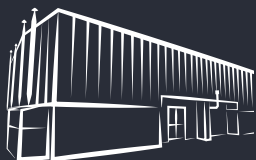
Bangor Campus



Ballynahinch Campus



Newtownards Campus



Dundrod Campus



Hollywood Campus



Newcastle Campus



Lisburn Campus



Downpatrick Campus

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