

Welsh innovation receives global recognition for helping to save and improve lives

Backed by over £3m Welsh Government funding and run in collaboration with Innovate UK, the Small Business Research Initiative (SBRI) has gained interest from other UK devolved nations as well as attracting attention from Ireland, Sweden and Australia.

Launched in Wales in 2013, the SBRI offers businesses – many of which are small and medium sized enterprises (SMEs) – the opportunity to bid for research and development (R&D) funding to develop technology-driven solutions for specific challenges facing the public sector.

Run as competitions each challenge focusses on an area of public service where solutions either do not yet exist or where partial solutions might be improved.

Areas where solutions are already being progressed include the improvement of health and patient care, medical treatments, road safety, renewable energy generation and environmental management.

To date, 14 SBRI competitions have been run in Wales, resulting in 66 contracts valued at approximately £5m being awarded to companies to develop Welsh public sector solutions: 44 contracts at Phase 1 (developing the proposal) and 22 contracts at Phase 2 (creating a prototype with a view to bringing it to market).

One of the first SBRI challenges run in Wales was by Betsi Cadwaladr University Health Board (UHB) which wanted to develop a solution to improve patient care by helping nurses and carers reduce administration duties so they could spend more time with patients.

The target of this challenge was for nurses to spend 10% more time with patients. After two years of practical collaboration between the UHB's nurses and a small Bangor start up company, Elidir Health, a software solution has been developed which promises to increase nurses' time with patients not just by 10% but potentially up to 23%. Indeed this challenge has been so successful that Elidir Health is now working with Cwm Taf UHB as well as Betsi Cadwaladr UHB to explore how this software can be adopted across both health boards' paediatric units.

The Welsh Government's own Transport department has also made use of SBRI challenges to develop solutions to identified issues, for example improving road safety and reducing the number of motorcyclists killed or seriously injured on Welsh roads.

Of the bids submitted to this challenge two projects were selected, with the

first example already complete.

Armourgel Ltd has developed a motorcycle helmet liner that will significantly reduce the impact to a rider's head during a collision. This can make the difference between a serious brain injury and a minor one.

The second project has developed a junction alert system which will soon be trialed on Welsh roads. The project will be able to test the system in peak motorcycling season and by September the company will have fully tested the system in all weather conditions and will report on its market potential.

Skills and Science Minister, Julie James is keen to point out that both these projects have the potential to save the lives of motorcyclists not just on Welsh roads but across the world, saying:

“The Small Business Research Initiative is a great example of how the public and private sector can work together to tackle societal challenges in innovative ways and deliver benefits to both public sector bodies and industry as well as the people they serve.

“My aim now is for our SBRI programme to become a mainstream tool in the Welsh public sector, promoting innovation and driving forward our technological potential.

“SBRI can open up huge opportunities for Welsh businesses and help solve some of the toughest challenges we will all face in the future and we plan to use it.”