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Moderator questions in Bold, Respondents in Regular text.

KEY: Unable to decipher = (inaudible + timecode), **Phonetic spelling** (ph) + timecode), **Missed word** = (mw + timecode), **Talking over each other** = (talking over each other + timecode).

Voiceover: The Queen's award is probably the most prestigious award that there can be won by any private company in our area. It gives our employees, within the company, that internal and external recognition that what we've been doing over this past number of years, really has been beneficial and successful. I think that a business should apply for the Queen's Award, because of the both internal and external recognition that it will-, it will give their employees and their customer base, and I think that it's a process that whenever it comes to the end, regardless of the outcome, there's potential benefits for that organisation.

Moderator: At this point, I'd now like to ask our panel members to join Nicky. So, we have with us this morning, Tom Connolly from EDGE Innovate, Steven Murtland from FinTrU and Gordon Brown from Kelvatek, and I know that, that the Minister needs to go onto another appointment this morning but we'll keep you posted, Minister, and thank you so much for taking time this morning. Thank you. Thanks guys. So, this is the section where we are really going to find out about the lived experience of some previous and the current years award winners but before we get into, to picking your brains about the, the Queen's Award experience, I'm gonna to ask you each, to give a brief two minute intro to your business. I'm gonna start with Tom, who's closest to me here, to tell us about EDGE Innovate and what you do.

M: Thank you very much. So, I'm Tom Connolly and I'm here today representing EDGE Innovate who are a exporter and a manufacturer of quarry plant and recycling equipment, based in Coalisland in County Tyrone and our company is-, exports account for around 95% of our business turnover, of which the largest market is within North America and we're growing outside of, of North America, year on year. The core focus of the business is innovation, whenever it comes to how we design and manufacture and ultimately export our equipment and our customer base is quite a varied one. From small scale entrepreneurs to multi-national companies and there's an ever growing demand, because of the, the nature of the products that we make, within our councils and municipalities and indeed governments, around the world. The company employs around 190 people, with the potential to increase that workforce massively in the next number of years. Thank you.

Moderator: Thanks Tom. Steven, can you introduce us to FinTrU?

M: No problem. Thanks very much for the invite today. FinTrU provide regulatory solutions for global investment banks. So, we're talking with products like Know Your Client, legal documentation and

compliance. Our solutions offer a blend of our people, our data, and our technology, and to put this into context, our teams work with our clients to mobilise the sanctions on Russia, realign post Brexit legal documents, and identify and prevent financial crime. We were a start up back in 2013 and attracted to Northern Ireland by Invest NI. We're now 1,000 people and offer hybrid working across the province, so that allowed us to recruit all across the region. FinTrU are a major contributor to the Northern Ireland economy, as all our revenue originates outside of Northern Ireland and, of that, 25% of it is from overseas and there are late exciting news, like Tom, is, you know, we're making plans. We want to grow further and over the next five years, we hope to double the size of our workforce and capitalise on the continued strong planned demand. Thanks very much.

Moderator: Thanks Steven. And, Gordon, can you tell us a little about Kelvatek, please?

M: Yes. Thank you for the invitation. Gordon Brown from-, Managing Director of Kelvatek. We provide a range of solutions, which include equipment, software and services for the electricity distribution network which, in effect, we-, what we do is provide a way for them to manage their network performance better. So, keep the lights on for everyone and, also allow them to connect more low carbon technologies to the network. So, we employ around 200 people, based in Lisburn, part of the Camlin Group and we are primarily focused on the UK and Ireland. So, our customers are the electricity distribution network operators, primarily. So that are-, those are the, the people right across the UK and Ireland, who run the electricity network supply to your home.

Moderator: Okay. Thanks, Gordon. So, Steven, I'm gonna come back to you. So, first of all, congratulations on your award this year in the international trade category. Can you tell us a bit about what inspired FinTrU to apply for a Queen's Award?

M: Yes, thanks very much Ann. As has been recognised, you know, this is one of the premier business awards in the UK and really it's recognition of our outstanding achievement and that's what attracted us to it. We looked through the categories and the one most applicable to ourselves was international trade, because of the growth and, as I said, oh the majority, 25%, all of our revenues are outside Northern Ireland. 25% of them are global. So, the criteria all fitted our narrative, as well, because how we see FinTrU evolving over the next five years, as we are going onto the global stage even more and this gives us the credibility, and the recognition, and the confidence, as well, because we've been assessed. Our application has been assessed and verified. So very, very positive recognition. So it is.

Moderator: Okay. And how did you find the application process, because I think we wanna debunk any, kind of, misconceptions about the complexity or how arduous it is or whatever. So, tell us a wee bit about your experience of the application process?

M: The application was fairly smooth, in terms of the operation of it. It does give you a great opportunity to sit down and think about your business and how you promote and what you're aiming for, so that you

can actually turn your mindset into more strategic, in terms of where you want to be. And, as I say, you know, it might-, your, gives you the, sort of, forward sight and how to plan the business. So, we found it very positive the-, in terms of how to complete the application, the thought process. How to promote FinTrU and was very fortunate that we've been recognised. So we have.

Moderator: So it encouraged you to reflect and whatever, and did you tap into the helpline at all? Or-,

M: We had a couple of logistical queries but it's-, the helpline was there when we needed it, but it was pretty straightforward, we felt.

Moderator: Great. Okay. So, Tom. Congratulations also to EDGE, as 2022 winners in the International Trade category but you're now a two times winner, having won in that same category back in 2019. So, EDGE Innovate obviously recognises what being an award winner can mean for your business. So, can you tell us more about what-, or how the award has benefited your business?

M: Well, I suppose there's two major strands to the benefits of the Queen's Award. The one that crosses both sectors, is obviously the prestige that is, is granted, whenever, whenever you receive the award, but looking at it from an internal point of view, it really cemented, within the workforce, the, the recognition of their achievements as well, because quite frequently, as I said before, whenever-, we're a company that is almost exclusively exporting our equipment, it can be sometime be quite difficult to translate that success back to the people that are the core people that are actually manufacturing the products. Or the people within the team, that they-, they play a pivotal role in getting those machinery and pieces of equipment out the door. So, whenever we receive the award, it really allowed us to, to fully express the achievements throughout individual departments within the company and, secondly then, from an external point of view, whenever you're customer facing, it's, it's hard to quantify the exact benefit of it but there's one thing, for certain, that it is-, sits at the pinnacle of our discussions whenever we're talking. Particularly with some, some more governmental council facing potential clients and it gives that recognition that quite often can be hard to convey, whenever you're talking to a new company or indeed a new individual, who could be located in Japan or in South Korea. Like, I would give one example of a project that we worked with a company in Japan, who were called JCE and they're one of the largest conglomerates in Japan.

They were completing a new biomass recycling or biomass power station in Hokkaido and, as part of our presentation towards them, we identified that we were a Queen's Award winner and it was actually during the, the tendering process and that particular discussion that we had with them around the Queen's Award, the importance to the Queen's Award to the local economy and from a-, from a local and a national level. I personally believe that it give us that additional credibility that, that allowed us to ultimately secure the contract, which resulted in-, it was a couple million contract that ultimately allowed us to, to, to win that

award. And then whenever we're looking at it, again, going back to the internal perspective, you know, we used it as an opportunity to quantify what we had achieved in individual markets. We also used it as an opportunity to try to set our goals for the future. So, as I mentioned, because we're exporting so much of our equipment, we were able to break down each individual country. What percentage of our business was being taken up by that individual country and what amount of work we had put into it. So, all and all, the benefits are great. Both from internal perspective and then from a-, from a-, from a-, from a outward perspective, client facing perspective.

Moderator: Great. No, thanks Tom. So it's effectively a door opener, a seal of approval, internationally recognised, and a highly motivational award, actually, for your-, for your workforce.

M: Certainly, because, as I said, a lot of people are, are, and I suppose all businesses are the same, you know, there's no individuals. So, there's team efforts for everything. Different people do different roles but certain people within an organisation, maybe more acutely aware of the impact of, of-, around the sale, sort of, side of things, than the rest of, of the people within the company. So, you know, it just is a-, is a fantastic talking point. It's a fantastic opportunity to recognise individuals within the company and to, to make them aware of the impact that they make on the global scale for export.

Moderator: Fantastic. Yep. So, any tips you would have, Tom, in terms of the application process? Or any perspectives on it? Again, I suppose, trying to demystify the process and, and reassure anybody in the audience that is thinking of applying, that it is straightforward.

M: Yes. Well, we set up a team, basically. I suppose you would call it more of a senior team to, sort of, look at the application process and really have it-, use it as a, sort of, a discussion point for us. Whenever we were initially looking at the application, we have completed a number of applications for awards before in the past, but I think it was alluded to by some of the previous contributors, that the questions actually are-, they really do make you think about what you've done and what you've achieved. And, even for us, within the, sort of, the central, sort of, team, you know, your-, you are really able to reflect on what has been achieved and, you know, and busy day to day life and busy business, you know, success happens one day and the next day there could be something that, you know, it, it wipes it out of your memory. So, whenever you're able to, to reflect on what you've been-, you've achieved, I've seen it and still do see it as a fantastic opportunity for the team to come together to convey all of our thoughts on what we have achieved. And, regardless of winning the award or not winning the award, it's an extremely worthwhile task for, for a team to do, because it allows them to, to quantify what, what they have done, and, for us, we're use-, we use it as an opportunity to try to-, to try to set our goals for the future. Like, following on from the application this year, we are already using that application as a basis for our strategy for the next three years, and it's not because we're, we're looking to win another one in another three years. It's because we recognise that, the, the, the, the chapters, let's call it, of the application process can translate into a business strategy.

Moderator: Great. Thanks Tom. And Gordon, Kelvatek were winners in the innovation category in 2018. So, how has being an award winner helped your business?

M: Yeah. It was-, I was actually speaking to Gareth earlier about that one. When, in 2018, the company had a turnover of £14 million and this year we're forecasting £31 million turnover. The product has been adopted as a smart fuse technology, that's used to locate faults in the local to each network and also to re-close, to keep the lights on, to avoid interruptions to supply. That product has now been adopted by 100% of the market. So, everybody that we could sell it to, there are tens of thousands of these devices now rolled out across the UK. So, I think that, in a nutshell, is a-, is a pretty strong result for us-,

Moderator: Testament for-,

M: And, I mean, certainly I would encourage everyone here who would think of applying, to do so and I think that, you know, well Tom has spoken very well about some of the benefits to the wider business, when you look internally. The one thing I would add to that, as well, is we're-, and I was speaking to Steven and Tom, sort of, briefly beforehand, and we're in the battle for talent as well, in terms of trying to recruit the right kind of staff. And this is one thing that is very helpful in that respect. So, I think there's a-, there's a really-, there's multiple reasons why this is a very good, good decision.

Moderator: So, without putting you on the spot, that was 2018. Are you considering applying again?

M: Yes. We are, as it happens. So, we will be applying again, and we've got some new technology that we're very proud of. That's been rolled out substantially now with 10,000 units in GB, which basically does the, the, the, sort of, holy grail of fault location, in that we locate the fault before it happens. We're the first company in the world to operationalise this and, you know, we are now sending out people to actually fix faults before they've occurred, which, I think, we're, we're proud of. We also-, the same technology enables people to connect more electric vehicles and heat pumps to the grid. It provides visibility of that, which as we drive towards Net Zero, which we're very passionate about, we, we know is a hugely important. So, perhaps in two categories this time-,

Moderator: I was just thinking, yes.

M: Both in terms of innovation and sustainability.

Moderator: There you go. There's two applications already in the-, well that's good. Getting in the pipeline. Great. So, Steven, just gonna come back to you. Actually, so you're a, a freshly minted, international trade winner of the Queen's Award. So, what are FinTrU's hopes then, in terms of

what being a winner will mean for you in the coming years?

M: Yeah. As I spoke too, you know, the, the credibility, the prestige this gives us, helps us with creating the new client opportunities. Our markets in New York. It gets widely recognised and, as we say, the battle for talent. It's not-, we need the, the staff to deliver these services. So it's massively important for that. So, I get, as I say, the credibility on a global stage, that we can enter new markets confidently.

Moderator: Great. Great. That's great. Thank you. So, Nicky, I'm gonna-, I'm gonna come back to you, just because I learned a lot this morning, actually, from the session. Even in terms of the, the helpline and that, that, that, that you guys are at the end of the phone or whatever. Give us a flavour of the kind of questions you maybe get through the helpline? And they could be from the simplest to the most complex. Just, if anybody is-, has got questions, sitting in the audience that, you know, you can get an idea of, kind of, how the, the helpline is there to respond.

F: Yeah. So we handle a huge range of questions from more technical side of things, 'cause it's, it is ultimately a digital platform that we're asking people to use. Whilst we make that as easy to use as possible, obviously some people stumble on those types and, obviously, we're really mindful of that many of these applicants are very small businesses and they don't have a dedicated team. It's wonderful if they do but, you know, many people might be-, we had a winner down in Cornwall, Littlepod, who do Vanilla pods and they use the real vanilla pods, that are, kind of, misshaped, that not good enough for the, kind of, the little nice pods in your supermarkets, but they use the natural ingredients in other vanilla flavoured products. And, you know, there was just three of those. They just didn't have that dedication. So, they really, kind of, heavily relied on us, from everything to the, sort of, technical things to get around the system, but also some of the questions and about how it applied to them. And what we do, every year, we look at-, there's a button that you can add feedback instantly but also we survey all of our winners and all of our applicants, so those unsuccessful, and we ask key questions. It's quite a huge survey and, and we learn from that, and we draw on that, and every year we make incremental changes. So, we will add extra help copy to certain questions, just to make it really, really clear. What we expect. What the evidence that you should provide and how that can relate to your company, no matter what size, but we, we really do handle quite a huge range of questions.

I'd say, probably, people ask us a lot about the overseas sales. So the growth that we're expecting and obviously that will be different for each sector. So, it's really about knowing your market and knowing how your faring, compared to your competitors.

Moderator: Okay. Thanks Nicky. So, that's all I have, in terms of what I was going to position to the panel but I'm sure there may be questions in the audience. So we're gonna open it up to the floor, if anybody has any questions you want to put to the panel. Any observations or comments? No. Just absorbing, processing all of that? That's-, oh, there we go. Okay. There's the mic behind you. Thank you.

M: Oh yes, hi. So, my name's Terry Canning from CattleEye. I had a question, just in terms of the, the number of hours it took to, to fill in the application. Does anybody, sort of, have that number?

M: I, I suppose-, I know from our point of view, we, we didn't really look at it in terms of-, in terms of-, as a individual, sort of, thing that we quantified the hours against. We-, because we looked at it from, sort of, a team and then going off and do the individual work, there, there was a lot of time put into the thinking behind it and the conversations around how we were gonna structure the answers and, ultimately, gathering up the physical information from, from, from our sales and things like that but we've used that outside of the Queen's Award. So, I suppose in core hours, actually physically, you know, the, the market monitor within our company physically completed the application form. You could be talking, maybe, eight to ten hours, once all the information was gathered, but the gathering of that information, will for us anyway, it shouldn't be looked at in isolation. You know, that-, you know, you can use that in other places throughout your business.

M: Thank you.

Moderator: Okay. Any others? No. All good. Well, listen, we have this room until 10.30 this morning and I'm sure the guys would be happy to take any questions you might have on a one to one basis, if you don't wanna do so in plenary now. So, I suppose, just to close, I'd like to thank all of our speakers this morning, all of our contributors. To David and his colleagues. To the Minister, who was able to join us earlier. To Nicky and Will, for coming over, and for all of you coming to hear about the Queen's Awards for Enterprise. I look forward to seeing more applications the next time I'm sitting on the judging panel or whatever. So, thank you all for coming along this morning.

Voiceover: I didn't realise the Queen's Award for Enterprise was so accessible. So to find it so accessible and a very clear and simple process, and the criteria for judgement, and, and gaining an award, has been tremendous. I'm quite encouraged by some of the talks from previous winners and also from some of the judges and we will be applying for at least two categories, innovation and international trade. So, Invest Northern Ireland invited people to come along. They've been brilliant initiative.