

MG Rover Group's Response to The Lambert Review of Business-University Collaboration.

1 There appears to be very little if any sharing of patents between the company and academia. This is probably because the motor industry is highly competitive and is secretive about its designs etc. I would suggest that where patents are shared it is where the industry or company has massive investments in the development of technology by universities. This may be the case in medical science for example.

2 MG Rover works on a number of joint ventures with universities. These include engineering projects and management courses such as leadership and managing the work force successfully.

We hope to engage with a local university on a project that will lead to our developing a shared design centre. This will innovate design and design education for the company and the region.

3 We continue to use universities to develop staff in a number of subjects, but this takes a good deal of effort to organise if it is outside of the traditional curriculum characterised by degree courses. Universities are as good and co-operative as the people who work in them. Sometimes those people are flexible and want to listen, but at other times they are not. Some academics only want to engage with companies if staff from those companies are going to attend formal courses.

4 We do not tend to use universities as consultancies. The culture in the company is generally opposed to this. I think that there is little faith in the ability of universities to act in the way industrial consultants do. They are perceived as working in a different culture and in different time-scales.

5 In order to facilitate successful partnerships universities would have to be directed to do this as part of their objectives. This would then have to be supported by funding linked to these arrangements. The companies would have to be encouraged with realistic funding opportunities that would not be tied to whole qualifications, but the successful outcomes of the projects they intend to work on with the universities. The government/

funding agencies would have to keep bureaucracy to a minimum and provide clerical staff to do it.

6 The main barriers to developing relationships between industry and universities are the cultural differences that exist. The universities are governed by government initiatives that are largely political and industry is driven by profit.

Academics have different aspirations to industrialists and vice versa. There is a snobbery on the part of academics and an inverted snobbery on the part of industrialists. This drives a wedge between them.

7 Priority setting, decision making and funding are all opposed to the successful integration of industry and education in this country. The only companies that can afford to engage with universities are those that are rich enough to command the attention of the universities by paying very large sums of money for research that they want. This tends to be of a very intellectual type and reflects the ownership of knowledge. An example of this would be medicine where some of the best brains are employed by the NHS/universities.

Manufacturing industry and commerce does not usually perceive that the best brains to solve their problems are to be found in universities:- the exceptions tend to prove the rule. Industrial and commercial issues tend to be dealt with in universities as conceptual issues without the need to focus thoughts on practical outcomes and techniques. For example, management problems are addressed by reference to accepted scholarly research that has produced intellectual models without any thought given as to how these could be translated to the workplace so that they may benefit industry. Therefore industrialists accuse academics of living in ivory towers.

Universities work on different time-scales to industry. What is a quick turnaround to industry is not the same for a university.

University staff are time-tabled on linear programmes that span the academic year. This means that they are not always available in the same way that an employee of a management consultancy may be.

The funding of courses governs what can be done by universities and given the encouragement needed to get industry to participate this provides a limited incentive. A degree course can take up to five years to complete. In this case it is viewed as something of an act of faith by industry and not a training scheme. Companies do not wait five years for someone to acquire the skills to do a job. They will look for training that can be accessed immediately.

Governments need to decide whether universities are there to educate the nation: in which case they generally do a very good job, or whether it wants to provide a training and consultancy service to industry and therefore the culture of academia will need to change. The problem is that something valuable could be lost in either case.

In relation to this, if decisions are being made on different priorities then we must expect different outcomes.

Funding hinders the relationship between industry and universities because it is attached to specific outcomes such as whole qualifications. This is ironic when it is considered that universities assess students performance on units of learning as small as a 2000 word assignment, but cannot get funding unless a much greater quantity of learning has taken place. This detracts from the universities' ability to offer bits of knowledge that may appertain to the individual's job needs.

8 Technology transfer is always going to be a problem. This is because technology begets technology and the companies that produce software will always create built-in obsolescence by designing new software. Every time someone brings out a new software package it is often incompatible with that being used by another organisation with which they have contact. This means that both organisations have to change to the new system. Everyone appears to be chasing their tails. This makes working between one department and another difficult. Attempting to do so between universities and companies can often become impossible. Another problem of technology transfer is cost. It is hard enough for companies to keep up with the latest development, let alone the universities who are generally less well funded than private organisations.

9 I think that the present arrangements over intellectual property are not fully understood. The possessiveness that exists around new innovations

mean that the current arrangements are never put fully to the test. However, there is the other issue that some ideas are shared and lost as the intellectual property of an individual or organisation because no-one realises that it is an asset and therefore they share it with anyone.

10 the gaps that can be found in the make up of graduate recruits are of a qualitative nature. It is difficult to overcome these because no university course can be a panacea for all the requirements of employers. Some qualities come through experience and young graduates need on the job coaching to learn these. All companies have to take responsibility for developing their graduates and should not expect graduates to come into the workplace like experienced professionals.

11 Those businesses that are willing to participate in on-going discussions with universities must reinforce their view at every given opportunity. When universities do not listen the businesses give up and think that they will just advertise for a particular type of recruit and hope that they find him/her. The dichotomy between the cultures is based on the fact that businesses want clever people with practical skills and universities want intellectual people capable of understanding and manipulating ideas.

Unfortunately, businesses tend to have expectations of finding immediate solutions to their problems and get bored and frustrated talking to academics and academics find businessmen equally boring and only useful for providing new money by way of charging full-cost recovery for courses. If business people were bothered to look further they would find that much of the knowledge that is being sold to them can be found in courses leading to off-the-shelf awards and they would only have to pay the usual fees.

12 The problem with career paths for science and technology graduates is that there are very few careers that only require an individual to be good at science and technology. Outside of the research careers for super scientists and technologists such as those in universities, government or private laboratories all other careers require that an individual manages people when they are promoted to more senior positions. This requires that the science or technology graduate actually has a hybrid of skills just like anyone else pursuing a career path. Some science and technology

graduates will have the ability to acquire these additional skills, others will not.

Where pure scientific and technological jobs exist they tend to require higher degrees such as PhDs. There appears to be little extra money in these jobs in order to provide an incentive to undertake them. Also, technology actually makes many people redundant. Therefore jobs in these areas may be perceived as being insecure. In this country manufacturing industry has been in decline so we are expecting young people to join a declining sector. This is not going to sound like an exciting prospect to them.

In order to create exciting career paths for science and technology graduates industry must first of all be in a position to offer them a career path rather than what may appear to be a temporary job.

13 Businesses tend to set a standard they will apply to recruitment and hope that they will be able to achieve it by appearing sufficiently attractive to individual applicants.

Any dialogue that was facilitated between business and universities would have to start by each party understanding the other's agenda. They would have to recognise that they have separate aspirations. There may be a point at which these converge but this will be in the individual's future not in their present. Any dialogue must start with the understanding that universities need to educate people and businesses need to train them. The two are not incompatible, but neither are they the same.

14 Current funding arrangements are not helpful. They undoubtedly create work for the civil servants who administer them, but they also create work for the businesses that may want to use them. Unfortunately, the burden of administration that falls on to a business can make the proposed tax incentive a disincentive.

University funding is geared to what they are expected to achieve in terms of government policy not what businesses necessarily want. Also, what some businesses want is unrealistic.

15 Tax credits may offer some incentive for businesses to undertake research and development, but what really influences it is competition. Businesses research when they think that their competitors will steal the march if they do not advance their products.

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