

## **Response to the Lambert Review of Business-University Collaboration from the North East Wales Institute of Higher Education (NEWI)**

NEWI's Strategic Plan highlights the importance of extending and strengthening links between NEWI and business, and we welcome this opportunity to contribute to debate and policy development.

### **1) Best practice and examples of excellence**

- **Joint ventures**

NEWI's vision is to become a market lead, student centred university of international significance which is open to all. That vision is made evident by our willingness to collaborate, with business and with other HEIs.

NEWI has established a Science Discovery Centre on its main campus in partnership with Cardiff based Techniquest. The initial focus is on its role as an educational resource for schools and other learning groups. It is intended that companies will play an important role in the Centre's further development, as contributors of exhibits and learning events, and through the Centre's provision of a focus for information, events and network building which have an impact in the fields of technology transfer, innovation and entrepreneurship. The relationship with Techniquest developed through NEWI's role as one of the partner organisations responsible for the annual Wrexham Science Festival. The achievement of the Centre's establishment is the result of commitment from senior management supporting and consolidating that of staff implementing the joint venture. The Centre will provide an additional route through which staff in many subject areas will have additional opportunities to engage in Third Mission activities.

NEWI is considering a proposal by a design and marketing company to base its operations in the NEWI Innovation Centre. The recently established Innovation Centre is to be a base for a cluster of creative companies, with synergy between their products, services and markets providing business opportunities for the companies themselves, freelance and work placement opportunities for students and graduates, and an outlet for academic research and consultancy expertise.

NEWI's Hydrocolloids and Advanced Materials research groups form elements of the WDA accredited Centre for Advanced and Renewable Materials (CARM), together with research groups of University of Wales, Bangor. The partnership is in this case one between two HEIs. In terms of university – business interaction, the benefit of the partnership is the CARM Commercial Manager's role in providing a clear route for companies to a range of complementary expertise.

- **Informal contacts**

Several of NEWI's academic subject areas increase their potential for interaction with business and other organisations by organising and hosting conferences and seminars for regional, national and international audiences. Chemistry, Education and Medical Education have been particularly active in this respect. In the case of Chemistry, such activity has led to the creation of a research centre sponsored by industry.

NEWI has successfully integrated in its Careers Centre a number of initiatives designed to enhance the employability of graduates and to foster positive attitudes to enterprise and entrepreneurship among students and graduates. The initiatives include extracurricular project based placements, a job shop service placing students into temporary work, a

programme enhancing the skills of students who wish to use their subject based expertise in freelance work and a programme of workshops designed to enhance graduates' business awareness and associated skills. The Careers Centre also acts as a first point of contact for the Entrepreneur Scholarships scheme and Wales Spinout Programme. In addition to the benefits realised by students and graduates taking part, these programmes also contribute significantly to the range of contacts made with business, to business awareness of NEWI, and to the development of a robust informal association encouraging knowledge transfer between NEWI, its own graduates and other graduates in the area. Newi's Careers and Employability Working Group prepares an annual Work Experience and Employability Plan, linked to its Learning and Teaching Strategy and its Higher Education Economic Development Business Plan. This provides a clear strategic focus linking the relevant objectives in our corporate Strategic Plan.

The introduction of Foundation Degrees in the portfolios of the majority of NEWI's subject areas has enhanced the extent to which programmes of study are aligned with employers' requirements. The involvement of employers, in curriculum design and in the provision of opportunities work based learning has the additional benefit of increasing business awareness NEWI's strengths and of the range of channels for knowledge transfer.

NEWI has developed and is currently piloting an electronic enterprise management tool, to enhance contact, relationship and project management. Its introduction will enable all staff to be better informed about contacts with business and will enhance our capacity to ensure that enquirers' and clients' expectations are met or exceeded.

- **Formal contracts**

NEWI's participation in the Wales Spinout Programme (which aims to commercialise university know how through providing support for spinouts before and after company creation) demands that each application for support is accompanied by a clear statement of the facilities and support which are to be offered by NEWI, whether or not IP is to be licensed or assigned. This provision in the modus operandi of the programme ensures that the nature of the relationship between NEWI and the companies we help launch is clearly defined and designed to support the aims and objectives of both parties.

In terms of the nature of contracts themselves, NEWI is seeking to ensure a consistent approach to contracting through the preparation and maintenance of "standard" contract templates and their availability to all staff, coupled with specialist advice and support. This is designed to facilitate interaction through minimising "process" barriers.

## **2) Perceived barriers to strengthening relationships with business**

- **Management and organisational issues**

A barrier to establishing effective links with business can be the extent to which knowledge of institutional resources, and of existing contacts, is held by individuals and departments and not readily accessible across the institution. This can inhibit both the speed and effectiveness of our response to enquiries and strategic planning. At NEWI, the introduction of the enterprise management tool is designed to overcome such barriers.

Third Mission activity has often been considered in the university sector as an add-on rather than as an essential core activity. The result is funding mechanisms and a culture within institutions and policy making and funding bodies which does not encourage such activity. NEWI's vision, values and objectives provide positive encouragement for engagement in Third Mission activity. There are however conflicting signals emerging from policy making

and funding bodies, suggesting differentiation of priorities within the sector on the one hand and on the other exhorting all institutions to increasing the extent to which knowledge is commercialised. Such conflicting signals are unhelpful to institutions' efforts to embed a culture of enterprise among staff.

Higher Education Institutions have traditionally been risk averse, a barrier at times to the creation of relationships for knowledge transfer. A greater understanding of risk assessment and risk management, on the part of senior managers and other staff will enhance institutions' capability to take on challenging relationships.

- **Technology transfer and intellectual property**

Smaller institutions can experience difficulty in ensuring that sufficient specialist staff are in place to ensure effective technology and IP exploitation. We welcome recent developments in Wales encouraging the sharing of good practice and resources, and making specific proposals for such initiatives.

### **3) Supply of graduates and postgraduates to business**

- **Quality and skill set of graduates**

FDS returns indicate that NEWI's graduates are successful in the labour market, a result in part of our explicit vocational and multivocational bias in programme design which emphasises transferable skills as a key ingredient. We anticipate that our work in embedding entrepreneurship in the curriculum (supported by ELWa Knowledge Exploitation Fund) will pay dividends in terms of enhanced employability as well as in business creation, through increasing motivation, flexibility and self awareness among students.

- **Communication of skill needs**

NEWI's portfolio has for many years included programmes accredited by professional bodies, thus providing very clear and formal channels for employers to communicate their expectations and requirements. The introduction of Foundation Degrees has similarly been accompanied by the involvement of employers in programme design and delivery. Our current Work Experience and Employability Plan goes further, indicating that Subject Consultative Boards with external employer members are to be introduced across all subject areas.

- **Career paths for science and technology graduates**

The Wrexham Science Festival (a programme of events organised jointly by NEWI, Wrexham County Borough Council and other organisations) has provided a vehicle for involving employers in supporting events aimed at highlighting the relevance of science and technology in society in general terms, and in supporting a new venture in March 2003: a careers fair focusing specifically on science and technology, attended on this first occasion by some 600 school students.

TCS represents an important vehicle for NEWI's development of links with business. It is also a helpful tool in encouraging awareness among students and graduates of the routes and opportunities which exist for career development and further training in science and technology.

- **Business plans to attract the best talent**

Higher Education Institutions' awareness of the plans of business to attract the best talent depends on the effectiveness of internal communication as well as that of external contacts and dialogue. That is why we believe that the interlinking of our Work Experience and Employability Plan, our Learning and Teaching Strategy, our Higher Education Economic Development Plan and the policies and processes which support their implementation is so important. That interlinking enables external communications to have a benefit across the institution.

#### **4) Financial considerations**

We welcome the progress made by HEFCW to consolidate Third Mission funding streams, and support the recommendation of the Joint HEW-HEFCW Working Group on Third Mission that such consolidation continue, together with provisions to ensure greater continuity and sustainability.

It is evident that the plethora of schemes supporting HEI-business interaction more generally is not always clearly understood by business, or by HEI staff. More effort to ensure that such schemes are complementary would be welcome.