



Lambert Review Consultation Response

Examples of good practice

APU has a tradition of working with business and the community in a range of ways. All of these relationships require a significant amount of time and effort to build and maintain. Some activities are based on a two-way partnership and others are more complex, with a range of stakeholders contributing or benefiting from the project or business activity. The potential range of stakeholders includes:

- HEFCE
- Regional HEIs
- RDAs
- LSC
- Partner FE Colleges
- Industry and professions
- Health Authorities

A selection of good practice examples is given below.

Partnerships

Ford Group/APU

This partnership has developed over a period of 20 years and involves a wide range of education, training and consultancy. This includes MSc and degree programmes, HNC Engineering, Business Systems Training and support, consultancy on engine management and tribology research, as well as IT support, project management and administration. At its' peak, 20 staff were involved in delivering and supporting the partnership.

Health Contract

There is a robust partnership framework that accommodates collaborative strategic planning and monitors operational implementation. Curricula are jointly planned and implemented to meet the developing needs of the health sector and formal mechanisms exist to achieve this collaborative work. This activity is complemented by comprehensive informal contact between academic and service sector staff. Because of professional requirements undergraduate students undertake circa 50% of their education as work placement and this is achieved through successful collaboration. The quality of the partnership framework was key in achieving a QAA SQR score of 23 in nursing and health studies – so judged excellent by QAA. We provide £3 million worth p.a. of CPD to the health sector to directly meet identified workforce development needs. A successful initiative has been the 'search conferences' as initiated by APU in partnership with NHS where service development priorities are identified by the sector, e.g. cancer. Key stakeholders are brought together with a clear agenda for change, and action priorities are identified and progressed.

The above has been largely initiated by APU with sector partners in Essex and Cambridge. AUUE (hosted by EEDA) has established a Health Liaison Group that brings a wider range of partners together across the region and a stakeholder conference concerning collaborative working is to be held in June 2003.

Industrial Links

APU has 5 teaching company schemes which are beneficial in terms of technology transfer, staff development and the achievement of additional postgraduate awards for associates.

There are 2 Royal Academy of Engineering secondments, - one to Marconi and another to Rolls Royce. These six months secondments, largely externally funded, have helped in developing research activity and providing staff development opportunities.

Two industrial patents have been granted on ideas where the member of staff is primarily research orientated and has a limited teaching load.

Work is on-going with Hospitals and Hospital Trusts as well as industry in developing a Health Technology Research Unit. This brings together public and private funding to support research and consultancy activity, particularly with consultants at Broomfield Hospital, Chelmsford.

Development Projects

APU manages a wide range of ESF projects aimed at supporting SMEs in the East of England. Several of these include learning modules developed within APU and, in some cases, accredited through APU.

Project BUILD (provides funding for training in SMEs) was initiated by the East of England Business Group (comprising CBI, IoD, Chambers of Commerce and a dozen other trade organisations) with support from EEDA and SBS. Participating companies are free to commission suitable training with the supplier of their choice.

Project WISE focuses on training for companies on environmentally sustainable strategies as well as providing a direct recycling operation, partly engaging people with learning disabilities.

Legal Profession

Good examples of business-university liaison would be the contribution of various solicitors who have membership of Legal Practice Course Committees and many students' prizes sponsored by the legal practices.

West Ham United Football Club, as part of its partnership with APU, has permitted a law student to have a work experience in the Legal Department/Company Secretary's office at Upton Park.

SMEs

The Ashcroft International Business School Centre for Business Transformation is dedicated to working with SMEs, in particular Family Run Businesses. CBT provides support and guidance on business growth and development through a series of activities including seminars, development workshops and mentoring offered to businesses which are in a growth phase and required to manage change effectively.

Employment Bureau

APU runs an Employment Bureau which not only offers part-time employment opportunities to its' students, but also seeks full-time career placements for graduates. This service is well used by students and helps to build strong links with employers.

Main Barriers

There appear to be a large number of potential barriers to working externally and these often depend upon particular circumstances. The very nature of universities means that it is unlikely there will be a common vision about the need or the desire to interact with business and how this should be achieved.

Organisational culture is key to facilitating this activity. Whilst the focus and majority of funding is so clearly geared to core business – teaching students – developing links with business and industry remains a marginal activity.

The potential conflict for HE staff in terms of priorities – teaching, research, reach-out, personal survival – means that reach-out has to compete with higher priorities. Staff skills may be inappropriate to reach-out activity and there is generally insufficient incentive for staff, other than personal interest, to engage with business.

Whilst many universities have a very wide range of expertise and knowledge, this potential is not easily realised. The expertise and knowledge is not always in a viable form for business application and often cannot be delivered within commercial timescales. For businesses, universities are not an obvious source of advice and help. Once identified, the access route is unclear and communication is problematic when language, culture and expectations are so different.

Clearly there are additional barriers in working with SMEs – the range of support on offer is complex and confusing. HEIs are viewed by owner-managers as irrelevant to the needs of small business and any activity that does exist is very dependant upon personal relationships. The sheer scale and diversity of the potential market is difficult for HEIs to tackle and a cluster approach would seem a good way to manage this diversity.

Competing priorities of partners, whoever they may be, are also a barrier to achieving a productive relationship. Business support agencies should be in a position to provide good links into HEIs, but from the point of view of the business, the offering is confusing. There are too many initiatives, the public sector agencies are often viewed as unhelpful, with each organisation having its' own short-term agenda and targets. This presents a very fragmented and confusing picture to business

Technology Transfer and IP issues are very time consuming and many HEIs do not have sufficient funds or staff expertise to realise the full potential of marketable ideas or products.

Graduates into Business

Courses are regularly reviewed to ensure as far as possible that they meet business needs. Most of APU's courses are vocational and, therefore rely heavily on input from business and professional bodies.

APU has a very positive approach to Widening Participation and many students on entry do not have traditional A level profiles. The level of support and value added

ensures that graduates on the whole achieve excellent results and make a very effective contribution to the organisations that employ them.

Improved career guidance and advice relating to engineering and technology occupations could enhance the attractiveness of these professions.

Funding

Reach-out is largely marginal to the core business – it is not yet main stream in terms of income. As a result, involvement and commitment is regarded as optional and participation is variable.

High overhead and infrastructure costs mean that it is more difficult to be competitive with private providers. Accounting procedures are based on grant distribution rather than income generation and as a result are less flexible and responsive to business needs.

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