

Lambert Review of Business-University Collaboration

Response from the London Metropolitan University

1. London Metropolitan University was created on 1 August 2002 from the merger of University of North London and London Guildhall University. Both antecedent Universities were formerly Polytechnics and both had:
 - a mission to provide access to Higher Education for all potential students, no matter what their background
 - a mission to play an important part in the local and regional economy and community
 - experience of many years of working with business and the community
 - a central London location, next to areas of both enormous wealth and extreme poverty
 - a student body not typical of the national average: 80% are over 21 and 60% are non-white
 - research which is applied and close to market, rather than 'basic' or 'blue skies'

2. This distinctive past has shaped the way links with industry have been developed and the resulting activity. **In response to Question 1** of the consultation paper, these activities are summarised below.
 - a) Employability initiatives
 - Student consultancy in Consumer Psychology – see case study 1
 - Developing undergraduate entrepreneurial abilities – see case study 2
 - Developing access to employment in legal profession – see case study 3
 - Developing organisational disability awareness – see case study 4
 - Private sector funding for research degrees in Hospitality Management – see case study 5

 - b) Practitioner/employer consultation groups, e.g.
 - Computing for Business Forum. An initiative to facilitate networking amongst managers in the computing industry
 - Polymer Technology Advisory Group – one example of many where industrialists constitute a formal advisory group to all aspects of the Department's work.

 - c) Courses designed for industry e.g.
 - MSc Financial regulations: run in close consultation with the industry, the Financial Services Authority and other bodies. Fulfils the exam requirements of the Compliance Institute. Guest lecturers include leading practitioners and regulators
 - MSc Manufacture and Design for Polymer Products: designed to meet industry needs, includes a work placement in a European company
 - MSc Information and Knowledge Management: an executive masters programme designed, with considerable input from key employer groups, to equip graduates to develop careers in the fast-growing area of

managing organisational information and knowledge assets. Designed for senior managers within organisations.

d) Knowledge transfer activity, particularly with SMEs. This has included:

- Consultancy
The University routinely undertakes consultancy projects including areas such as food and nutrition, polymer technology, business solutions, ICT and digital media and so forth. One recent consultancy project was on behalf a Japanese scientific instruments company - see case study 6
- TCS – see case study 7
- Contract research
Recent activities include research into London's business community on behalf of Business Link for London – see case study 8
- Training for industry e.g.:
Cisco Academy Associate and Professional training; short courses in digital media eg xml, WAP, building websites; Microsoft .net training; lighting design; expert witness; European language training for business; plastics and rubber technology, production and design short courses for the polymer industry.
- Events e.g.
'Partnerships for Smarter Business' to disseminate activities of the University to businesses in collaboration with a local business forum; networking events for the food and tourism sectors.

3. Recent 3rd stream funding from HEFCE has helped us to consolidate this activity, and has enabled us to achieve a number of objectives:

- establish a first-stop-shop for 2-way communication between the University and business/industry;
- appoint nine sector business development manager posts in:
 - Computing and Multimedia
 - Opto-electronics
 - Languages
 - Polymers
 - Food
 - Jewellery and Silversmithing
 - Furniture Manufacturing
 - The Finance Sector
 - Specialist SME support,

each of which is designed to match London Metropolitan expertise with significant areas of business and employment in London.

- promote cultural change internally through dissemination of information and ideas;

- build links with businesses and business support agencies through outreach work including joint activities e.g. with Chambers of Commerce;
 - expand marketing activities including the development of promotional literature, presence at exhibitions and direct marketing activities;
4. However, **responding to Question 2** of the consultation paper, the following issues hinder the development of this work:
- Staff incentives – a contractual matter for most Universities
 - Time release – an internal administrative matter solvable with funds
 - Confidence of staff, in some cases, to work with business – a staff development matter.
 - Skills of some staff, especially in succinct presentation to a business audience, again a staff development matter.
 - Resources and facilities
 - Ideology – some academics, though not the University as a whole, question whether they should get involved in this sort of activity
 - Initiative overload, especially from the Government via HEFCE.
 - Professional Bodies' requirements
 - The need for academics and business people to understand each other's world and *modus operandi*, a significant 'language and culture issue'
 - Our capacity to respond rapidly to business needs, given certain necessary or imposed bureaucracy.
 - The University's financial reliance on 'traditional' undergraduate and postgraduate course recruitment.
 - The tendency for any University to lean towards risk-aversion, given the need to deliver to tightly specified targets derived in the normal HEFCE way.

A significant number of these problems derive from universities ways of operating, which are generally geared to teaching and research to a more or less set pattern. Deviations from this pattern are difficult, but not impossible, to manage (hence the contractual issues, the response-time questions, the 'language and culture' issues and the ideological problems). Time and sufficient resources will solve many of them, and in our case a culture shift is already happening. An equally important question concerns the attitude of business, which is equally fraught with difficulties (for both parties). Understandably, business can easily become frustrated with the traditional University approach, and we all hear anecdotes to this effect. Equally, business tends to see itself as taking a risk when it works with a University; failure is blameworthy so businesses tend to take an extremely conservative approach, usually attempting to work with only the 'best' Universities. In this context, the 'best' are usually judged by RAE score, and yet it is frequently the research intensive universities that are furthest away from business in terms of the 'language and culture'.

5. **Question 3**, it seems to us, is largely for the business sector. As described above and in the case studies, we take employability and the quality of graduates (in terms of employment) very seriously, both at Departmental level and institutionally. There are, naturally enough, many questions concerning the rate of change of business and the equivalent rate of change required in Universities

to match it. Similarly, there are issues that relate to differences between businesses in the same sector. These imply that, although graduates can be trained in all relevant principles and techniques, including the capacity to solve problems, it is inevitably rare that any graduate emerges as a perfect 'ready-made' product for any given business. In turn, this clearly implies that business needs both to keep Universities informed of its needs, but also to have knowledge of the graduate product, in order to be able to design a brief induction/conversion to its own very specific needs.

6. We presume **Question 4** also to be targeted largely at industry and business.

CASE STUDIES

Case study 1: Student consultancy in Consumer Psychology

Students in the final year of the BSc Applied Consumer Psychology degree have a practical opportunity to develop and apply their theoretical knowledge by carrying out important work for employers. As part of their course students undertake independent, small-scale consumer research projects with companies and produce a commercial report and give an in-company presentation.

At the start of the 12 week assignment employers visit the university to outline their requirements and agree a project with each student. The students take responsibility for their project and act as a `consultant`, tackling real-life business challenges and producing solutions for genuine problems and products. The project develops many aspects important for graduate work typically: employer negotiation and creation of a client/customer relationship, development and analysis of questionnaires, qualitative analysis, time management, self organisation and reflection, and the development of communications skills.

Recent projects have included: the effects of colour on perceptions of perfumes; evaluation of company IT training programmes; consumer expectations of beverages, and a comparison between experiential and conventional advertising. As a direct result of their experiences, two graduates from the course have established their own agencies.

Case Study 2: Developing undergraduate entrepreneurial abilities *

North London has many small theatres and other performance venues and the programme involved cross-disciplinary groups of students and staff working together to support SMEs in the Performing Arts Technology sector.

Groups of students - two from Electronics/Computing and two from Business Studies, undertook the work during a two-week period in June. The programme produced a:

- study for the provision of a new sound system in a small theatre;
- feasibility study for the establishment of a refugee community radio service;
- study for the development of a new computerised booking service + on-line transactions and marketing in a performance venue;
- set of recommendations for new equipment in a small theatre

The opportunity was advertised and students selected from their submitted CVs; most had completed 2 years of their undergraduate course.

An induction session introduced the projects, discussed consultancy skills, group working, report writing, and provided a general background to performing arts technology. A central University contact was provided for any urgent issues arising, and academic staff could be contacted by email or at three, 2-hour `clinics`.

The programme imposed few requirements on the SMEs involved as students visited their organisation a maximum of 3 times, causing minimum disruption to work and placing no supervisory requirements on the organisations.

All of the organisations welcomed the close contact with the University and appreciated the work undertaken. Two of the SMEs expected to take the project recommendations forward.

* funded by Government Office for London.

Case study 3: Developing access to employment in legal profession

Since 1998 there has been increased competition for law training contracts. This was the background to a large-scale project undertaken by a cross-departmental team from the Careers Service, Employability Projects Office and the Law Department. The University is a national leader in widening participation to higher education and had 1,000 law undergraduates many from non-traditional backgrounds which are under-represented in the legal profession.

A week-long programme was devised and delivered to help students to develop the skills and confidence, alongside their studies, to work as an outdoor clerk - representing solicitors in court, taking notes, assisting counsel, and liaising with the client and court officials.

The programme has supported 130 students over five intakes with places being offered preferentially to those at considerable disadvantage in the labour market e.g. refugees, single carers and people with disabilities.

Case Study 4: Developing organisational disability awareness

All undergraduates at the university have the option of taking a subject-based professional placement module as part of their course. The placement is administered by the central Employability Unit and assessed by academic staff. With more than 4% of students classified as disabled, (the national university average is 1-2%) the Unit has established a special initiative to develop placements and other employability opportunities to enable these students to find suitable professional experience. To that end the Unit has produced and agreed with employers a disability strategy and protocols for placements for disabled students.

The Unit visits employers who may be willing to consider taking disabled students on placement - to discuss the support available and the specialist requirements of individual students. The Unit also provides targeted preparation, on placement and debriefing support for the students and offers `first day` settling-in support to both students and their employers.

Jen, a Human Resources & Business Law student, who has been blind since birth, and her guide dog Lindsey, took up a 6-week placement in the HR department of the national Guardian Newspaper. The employer was surprised at how relatively few adjustments had to be made to allow her to work with them. Jen says:

I was working in the Human Resource department and they were very, very good. They hadn't got much knowledge of disabilities, but I think they were very willing to learn and be flexible.` and of the experience itself:

`What I think is most useful about that kind of work experience is that it gives you a chance to learn what it's like to be at work, while also having some kind of safety net...it takes a lot of the stress away.`

Equally, the organisation learned an important lesson:

I think our expectations were certainly met, certainly met. I think now we wouldn't have any hesitation you know in sort of taking someone with a disability. There wouldn't be that sort of fear. She was one of us.`

After completing her placement Jen was one of two London Met disabled students - both supported by the Unit's *So?! What now?* sessions - to gain places on the national SCOPE graduate fast-track scheme; SCOPE only offers ten fast-track places each year.

Case Study 5: Private Sector funding for research degrees in hospitality management and on-going contribution to undergraduate programmes

The Hospitality Management subject field has extensive links with industry including an on-going commitment to ensure that high-calibre speakers and guest lecturers from industry, field visits and undergraduate consultancy projects on behalf of at least 4/5 companies annually are included in the undergraduate teaching programme. The department also has close ties with industry bodies such as the British Hospitality Association.

As result of these close industry links, a need was identified within the department for research into several areas including culture and consumption. The subject field leader, Pat Wood, successfully secured funding from the Savoy Group in 2000 for a PhD to be undertaken in this area. The funding of this project was a unique departure for the Savoy Group but it was highly impressed with relevance of the project to its own industry sector, the way in which the research focused on the industry's needs and the quality of teaching and students in the department as well as the research thesis itself. As a result, funding for three further research degrees has been obtained.

Case Study 6: Consultancy on national references for body fatness in UK children carried out in the Nutrition Group, Department of Health & Human Sciences

A Japanese company which produces instruments used in the domestic, clinical and health/fitness settings to measure body fatness in individuals wanted to develop a set of national references for body fatness in UK children.

The company's product involved relatively simple technology: principally, bioelectronic technology was embedded in a set of scales on which the individual can weigh themselves (just like a set of bathroom scales). The amount of fat in the body can then be determined with reasonable accuracy. This has taken the simple

bathroom scales to a new level whereby not only body weight, but body fat can be monitored in individuals who are gaining or losing weight.

The company wanted to be able to supply their product with a simple chart from which customers can tell whether a person has optimal, excessive or too little body fat. This would allow the monitoring of individuals' body fat which, in turn, would have major implications for how effectively the product was used. As the product is particularly effective with children, the company wanted to develop a set of national references for body fatness in UK children so that parents can tell how a child compared to national mean levels ie whether a child had optimal, excessive or too little body fat for their age. However, as there were no national references for body fatness in UK children, the company turned to the Department of Health & Human Sciences.

The consultancy undertaken involved the use of the company's product technology to measure a sample of around 1500 children aged between 5 and 18 residing close to London Metropolitan University. Once the measurements have been collected, the reference chart was produced using standard statistical techniques.

The research was carried out by Dr. David McCarthy and is the first chart of its kind. It represents a national benchmark for parents and healthcare professionals alike to monitor body fat in children with wider implications for the future health of the nation.

Case Study 7 – TCS* with Polybags Ltd

The London Metropolitan Polymer Centre, which is part of the University, is currently running a TCS programme with a west London company, Polybags Ltd.

The company is an independent producer of extruded, blown polyethylene film and a manufacturer of plastic bags which has recently invested heavily in new plant and equipment. The TCS programme will enhance the quality of their products, improve production efficiency, develop processes to test current product specifications and develop and launch new products using new materials and technologies.

This work is made possible by the extensive resources made available to the company through the London Metropolitan Polymer Centre, which has a large amount of polymer processing equipment as well as academic staff and technicians who are experts in the field of polymer technology.

*TCS (or Knowledge Transfer Partnerships as it may soon be called) is an important Government initiative which supports partnerships between universities and companies to work on projects of strategic importance to the company. Knowledge and technology are transferred via a recent high calibre graduate (Associate) and a dedicated academic supervisor. TCS is widely regarded as a successful initiative which brings benefits to all three parties. London Metropolitan University currently has four programmes with several other applications in development.

Case Study 8: consultancy and research- London's black and minority ethnic businesses

Business Link for London wanted to set up a number of Knowledge Centres with the purpose of informing and co-ordinating its strategy and initiatives in key sectors of business activity. In particular, the Black and Minority Ethnic Businesses Knowledge Centre was planned to provide a central co-ordinating and guiding role in translating the findings of relevant research into effective action in partnership with Business Link and the wider business support network. This in turn helps maximise the economic contribution of black and minority ethnic (BME) businesses to London's economy.

The Knowledge Centre needed to develop an improved understanding of the needs and trends within different BME communities and their contribution to London's economy. It therefore issued a tender for a consultancy and research project to look at the estimated number of businesses in each of the 5 Business Link for London areas (Central, South, West, East, North), to determine the proportion of total businesses belonging to each of the main industrial sectors (as defined by the main SIC codes) and to identify the challenges/issues affecting growth of businesses.

The International Institute for Culture, Tourism and Development (IICTD) was chosen to undertake the research into both the Vietnamese and Turkish business communities. IICTD is a specialist research Institute within the University which focuses on the study of culture, tourism and development, both in the UK and overseas. One of the contributory factors to its success in winning the consultancy tender was the extensive experience and expertise of its staff in this area as well as its existing links with the business community, in particular hard to access BME business groups (which make up 19% of all businesses in the capital). It has a long history of research, consultancy and training with a variety of businesses and SMEs in particular.

The research was undertaken throughout last year and has resulted in a sophisticated and instructive analysis of Turkish and Vietnamese BME businesses in London, which will inform the Business Link for London strategy for the foreseeable future.