

The Lambert Review of Business-University Collaboration  
1 Horse Guards Road  
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08 April 2003

Dear Mr Lambert

I am pleased to submit views on behalf of the University of Reading for your review:

### **1. Examples of best-practice and excellence in business-university collaboration**

#### *Joint ventures*

This University has several direct associations with specific industries including the Reading Construction Forum (supported by major companies in the construction industry), Reading Food Industry Training (supported by the food industry and DEFRA), and the International Securities and Marketing Association (ISMA) Centre. The \$5 million ISMA Centre is purpose-built for academic and professional education and research in international securities, investment and banking. It contains two INVEST dealing rooms with over 60 Reuters, Telerate and Bloomberg terminals and was paid for by a donation from the ISMA.

Our Enterprise Hub, and the University of Reading Science and Technology Centre (housing 16 SMEs), allow established and spin-out companies to be housed on campus with the benefits of access to academic departments and university facilities. Reading Scientific Services Ltd also operate from the campus and have active research links with several academic departments.

Additionally, we have the largest TCS Centre in the UK offering numerous opportunities for collaboration with a wide range of industries including IT, electronics, horticulture, energy, and bioscience. We believe that the TCS is of great benefit to both industry and the university because:

- Personal exchange is a very effective form of knowledge transfer
- Collaborative R&D benefits both parties in a short timescale
- The business gets other support in areas besides the technology (e.g. strategy, marketing)

- The University gets – new research topics, publications, case studies, guest lectures, consultancy, funding that counts towards the RAE, student visits and placements, improved project management skills for academics
- The business gets – research knowledge from outside the TCS project, use of facilities in the university (e.g. BioCentre, food processing plant), student projects, publicity through publications, enhanced profile, new companies launched

### *Development of relationships*

Most commonly the relationships have developed as a result of personal contact and academic reputation. In some cases, there has then been a need to develop a more formal relationship (such as the “Associated Institute” status of Syngenta) in order that it becomes more corporate and strategic.

Recently, links with Business Link have aided initial contacts (especially in relation to TCS and occupants of the Enterprise Hub) and networking by our own HEROBC Business Development Team, the TCS Centre Staff and Technology Transfer Staff (funded under HEIF) have expanded the variety of relationships.

### *Facilitation of successful partnerships*

Things that might assist better partnerships include:

- A closer relationship and understanding with Business Link (our Director of Research and Enterprise Services is on the Board of Business Link but there is only limited understanding of the role of, and opportunities offered by, a research-intensive university)
- A source of funding for short projects particularly for SMEs so that they can gain a taste of what working with a university might be like
- Companies being more open to collaboration

## **2. Main barriers to partnerships**

The major barriers to university-business relations that we have discerned are:

- Many smaller businesses do not realise that universities are willing to collaborate
- Universities still need to be easier “to get into”. We have established a “one stop shop” through our Business Information Officer but there is still much to be done to make Reading accessible
- Businesses are often unaware of the grant funding (e.g. TCS, Smart) that is available
- Within the university, there is still a need to encourage academics to engage with business via departmental and personal incentives. Academics require more support in setting up and managing projects
- Technology transfer issues include:

- a) Making companies and business support organisations aware of the range of diverse expertise available
- b) Personal contacts are the best means of transfer but these are difficult to manage in a university where the workload of academics is high and researchers are not always available at the “right” times
- c) Some businesses believe that because they have paid taxes then technology transfer from the university should be free
- There are still large gaps between academic research that is ready for technology transfer and “market-ready” technologies that companies want to buy, or that venture capitalists want to invest in. Some form of incentive to companies to encourage long-term relationships that also support very early development work might be beneficial. Our experience of the University Challenge Fund is that many projects proposed for funding are insufficiently developed for the fund managers to consider investment. An extension of the recently announced Wellcome Trust Translation and Strategic Translation Awards beyond healthcare might allow funding to bridge the development gap

### **3. Attraction of appropriately skilled graduates, especially in technology**

The focus of local Learning and Skills Councils has, rightly, been on the school and FE sectors but more could be done to communicate the skills’ requirements of graduates between business and universities. We used part of our HEROBC money to employ a graduate opportunities officer in the careers service as part of our efforts to develop a dialogue on skills and graduate programmes. This post has:

- Provided additional technical support to graduates
- Kept technology up to date for both the graduate and the company
- Encouraged links between industry (especially SMEs) and the university – technology transfer, TSC and research and development opportunities may follow
- Kept the university in touch with the skills required

For the future, it will be necessary to develop a management qualification appropriate to science, engineering and technology. Industry advisory boards should play a more proactive role in informing universities of what is needed and to assist in structuring teaching programmes.

### **4. Financial considerations**

Our comments on current financial arrangements are:

- Schemes such as TCS, HEROBC and HEIF have certainly helped us and should be continued to allow the culture change involved for effective knowledge transfer to become embedded.
- See final dot point of response to question 2

- A culture change is also necessary in some parts of business. Because universities are supported by taxes, too many businesses appear to view us as a potential source of cheap services and appear unwilling to pay the proper price for our expertise

A final point that I wish to bring to the attention of the review is our joint working with other universities to share good practice and for specific initiatives. The Thamesway consortium (comprising Reading, Surrey and Brunel universities and Royal Holloway College, London) works together whenever possible to advance university/business collaboration and knowledge transfer.

I hope that these responses are helpful to your enquiry and would be pleased to respond to any specific points that you would wish to pursue.

Yours sincerely

Peter Gregory