

RESPONSE TO UNIVERSITIES UK - THE LAMBERT REVIEW OF BUSINESS – UNIVERSITY COLLABORATION

Queen Margaret University College welcomes the opportunity to respond to the consultation paper “Lambert Review of Business – University Collaboration “. The document sets out a number of areas for comments as follows:

1. Best Practice and examples of excellence in business university collaboration in the UK and abroad and how the relationship developed

Queen Margaret University College (QMUC) has key strengths in health care, social sciences, theatre, arts, media and communication, food and tourism. It has strong links into sectors that reflect its areas of strength and has targeted relationships that foster these strengths. These activities include strong links into the public sector and the voluntary sector as well as into business given the profile of teaching and research in the University College and reflects the level and diversity of activity which arises from the social, arts and humanities activities of universities in addition to the science base. The activities in the University College also reflect the broader Knowledge Transfer agenda which is set out in the SHEFC guidance for its Knowledge Transfer Fund which as well as including industrial and technology transfer activities contributing to economic development, also includes healthcare, activities intended to contribute to improvements in healthcare and quality of life, cultural activities which enrich the cultural life of the nation and other activities which are of benefit to society. This includes the development of continuing professional and vocational education, dissemination of research, and staff exchanges between higher education and industry and other sectors.

We have set out some examples of current successful collaborations in the University College:

The Centre for Older Person’s Agenda was identified in 1999 as one of the major projects for which funding would be sought through the University College’s fund raising campaign “Talking Futures”. The University College’s Development Office made contact with a number of external organisations and the Centre received funding from the Robertson Trust and an anonymous donor for a period of three years . The Centre was established to conduct and disseminate research on the health and social needs of older people. This funding allowed for the establishment of the Centre and the secondment of a member of staff who undertook a year of networking with those working in this field including the Scottish Executive, and began to develop close working links with amongst others the Outlook Housing Association. These links then developed into a formal collaboration agreement with Outlook to collaborate on joint research projects and student and staff placements. The Centre has also successfully applied for funding from Zurich’s charitable fund and is developing links with that company. The Centre, furthermore, has now attracted a large donation from a major Scottish bank to support a Research Chair that is broadening the collaboration and developing the links in this area. This resulted from talks with the University College’s Principal and senior bank executives about areas of collaboration in the University College’s activities. The key elements from this example is the need to attract initial funding in an area which is of key importance to policy makers in industry, the public or the voluntary sectors, and this funding will enable staff to develop the network and build a critical mass.

Business Inspirations Scotland (BIS) is a unit which was set up in performing arts and is based on the premise that the skills which are required in acting apply to business – presentation skills, negotiating skills, leadership, team building, time and project management are all needed in pulling together a group of people and putting on, say, a play which is then presented to an audience. The BIS unit has begun to offer courses and services both internally to the University College but also, following on from a

business launch held in the Gateway theatre and a marketing campaign, externally to enterprise companies, local business and Edinburgh City Council. It has, for example, recently used scriptwriters and actors to prepare the tour guide for the Mary Kings Close - a major new venue for tourism in Edinburgh. BIS has also developed a relationship with a local retailing park and that is following on from a contact that was developed through staff in business and management who have contacts into the new Retailing Academy which has been established in Edinburgh. This relationship has been developed through discussion over the period of a year with this company over training needs and the development of videos using actors and the use of acting forums as a training tool for staff. BIS through the Innovation Manger in the Research and Innovation Office is also now working with Connect – Scotland technology business network – who organise events to introduce young technology companies to potential investors. The companies are given business advice on their proposals but are now also given voice and presentation skills training by BIS before they present their case to investors at these events. This has now also extended to the business plan for students events which Connect organise on behalf of the Scottish Institute for Enterprise.

Partnerships in Active Continuing Education (PACE) is a unit within dietetics and nutrition which has developed training and educational materials in nutrition for the health sector. It is a joint collaboration with the company Nutricia and there is a formal collaborative agreement with the company who are members of the PACE steering group. The relationship with the company grew out of networking with a key member of staff working on projects with the company. This led to a broadening of the relationship with the company and the establishment of the PACE unit. The advantage to the company is having access to the latest research in their business area but also being able to jointly develop nutritional materials.

The TCS scheme has resulted in a number of close associations with business including ethnic businesses and a new Centre for ethnic business is now being established in the University College. This scheme is also now eligible in the health sector and a scheme is being set up with the Centre for the Older Person's Agenda and Outlook Housing which will further cement the collaboration agreement that is in place.

2. The main barriers to strengthening relationships

The examples above have shown that one of the key issues is staff time and the need to network and to build contacts in a specific area. Universities are now moving to recognise academic input into knowledge transfer in staff performance reviews and to encourage staff to undertake this activity. However, often the barrier here is one of resource to fund this kind of networking activity as opposed to teaching and research within the university and to develop different skill sets for academic staff. It is important to find areas of mutual advantage for the university and the company or external collaborator once they have found each other and this in itself is a recognised difficulty. These areas of mutual advantage can take time to develop as can a mutual understanding of the different issues facing the academic and the industrial collaborator. This understanding is a two-way process and better communication and training - in the key organisational drivers in collaborating sectors delivered through a range of delivery mechanisms (e.g. industry groups, universities, enterprise agencies, regional agencies) would improve the collaboration process.

3. How business can attract the best graduates and postgraduates with the skills required

There are examples of larger companies or external collaborators working closely with university departments by funding masters and post-graduate programmes. This process can also allow the students to develop a relationship with the employer who may host events, workshops placements etc. QMUC has, for example, worked in close

collaboration with NHS Trusts to deliver courses in radiography and mammography and has devised courses in collaboration with Trusts to train students to address specific needs – e.g. additional radiographers to respond to the need to increase capacity in cancer treatment. There is currently discussion over the need for development of staff with clinical doctorates in the allied health professions in the Scottish Health Service and universities will respond by developing clinical doctorates subject to the availability of funding. This requires close working relationships and the capacity to forecast and plan ahead and this is where industry and other key economic sectors should have a process to articulate future skill needs and to express these to educationalists and universities.

In terms of business attracting the best graduates – business should develop good links with universities through careers offices and in some instances through faculty or departments. They themselves need to be offering attractive careers to students and to present a distinctive image in the recruitment marketplace.

4. Do financial considerations currently help or hinder relationships between business and universities

The development time in putting together projects is often unfunded. The process of applying for funds to develop projects – e.g. with SME's or other public bodies which do not have sufficient of their own development funds - can be slow. The search for funds can strain the developing relationship. There is a strong emphasis in knowledge transfer on science and technology and less emphasis on the social, economic, political and cultural environment in which the technologies are developed, disseminated and used. It is important to not only develop knowledge about technology but also knowledge about attributes that affect that technology - for example, characteristics of products, services and institutions that affect people's lives. Any funding should allow for research and collaboration that is relevant to innovation in key economic development areas such as tourism and culture and in areas, which have an impact on economic development such as health and learning technologies. It is also important to ensure that the universities are included in economic development action plans which are being funded by key economic agencies and where important strategic collaborations can be brokered and funded.

We trust that these comments will be of assistance in your consultation.