

HERA Barometer



Name of regional association:

Association of Universities in the East of England (AUEE)

A. Schemes introduced, or significantly re-purposed, to address the present economic downturn

Overview

This Region's HEIs have rolled-out considerable new activity to address the re-training needs of individuals and companies resulting from the economic downturn. These new services, that include internships, are contributing positively to a measurable improvement in the social and economic fabric of the East of England. The following case studies are indicative of this region's activity:

1. University of Essex

The University held the first of 3 School-for-Startups in Ipswich in July. The workshops focus on the six key steps that every startup business owner and aspiring entrepreneur should address. The event was attended by 170 people and feedback has been very positive. The next events are in Southend and Colchester.

Essex has launched its internship/work placement programme and 40 graduates have signed up who will be supported by a recruitment/matching officer to help students prepare CVs and visit companies who have expressed an interest in having a student on work placement.

The University is developing a service with Southend Borough Council to deliver a non-accredited course of skills and knowledge development for employed and unemployed people who are, or are interested, in working in the third sector. The programme will be at Levels 3 & 4 and will develop the learners in areas such as employment and HR, interpersonal skills and team building, finance, procurement and QA.

2. University of Bedfordshire

The University's 'Enterprise Summer School' successfully engaged with 35 students and others in the community, providing training in self-employment
<skills.<http://www.beds.ac.uk/news/2009/aug/090804-enterprise>>

Bedfordshire's Centre for Personal and Career Development is providing one-to-one careers guidance and workshops to graduates who are under employed. Initially catering for 20 graduates per month, it is expected to lead to interesting developments with the imminent Advancement Service which should play a key role in widening participation as suggested in the recent report from the Cabinet Office on Unleashing Aspiration.

3. University of Hertfordshire

Owned by the University, Exemplas Ltd has rolled-out a 'beat the recession, plan for recovery' programme to address the effects of the recession on business. Including a series of pragmatic workshops specifically designed to be eligible to draw down the Train-to-Gain Leadership and Management funding stream, themes include:

- Making & Saving Money
- Leading into the Future
- Managing into the Future in a Time of Uncertainty
- Finding & Retaining Customers

4. University of East Anglia

UEA has launched an Enterprise and Commercialisation service offering advice and financial support to undergraduates and postgraduates considering business start-up. It includes the ability to access Proof-of-Concept funding, mentoring and signposting to external providers.

UEA's Graduate Programme focuses on un-employed or under-employed recent graduates who can access group coaching to raise confidence and improve interview skills. Their Graduate Intern Programme has been launched as a 10 week programme for new graduates to work with SME's and third sector organizations. Companies receive a £400 grant from the ECIF allocation to support the internship programme cost of £1500. First Graduates have completed their placements – some have been offered full-time positions with their placement companies.

(499 words)

B. Increased demand for existing activity

Overview

Within the East of England, there are many new business-focused support programmes and so some universities are unable to compare demand. However, the overall number of enquiries serviced by HEIs is rising and of these, the percentage received from businesses and organisations requesting support is increasing.

There is considerable interaction between the region's HEIs and other agencies, indicative of which is the University of Bedfordshire's "Supporting Graduates in Employment". This is catering for 100 graduates employed in Bedfordshire SMEs with funding support and partnership of two local unitary authorities.

<http://www.beds.ac.uk/knowledgehub/development/supportinggraduates>

Evidence of other cross-regional activity includes the East of England Development Agency £3,000 Innovation Vouchers and the £1,000 Low Carbon Vouchers offered by the 'i10' knowledge exchange. Both have been hugely successful with a strong take-up across the six counties. The following case studies are indicative of activity:

1. Anglia Ruskin University

Anglia Ruskin has received significantly more SBM national applications than in any previous year and a greater percentage of these are now being received from those made redundant. Over 90% of Health & Social Care undergraduate and pre-registration courses have seen an increase in applications for 2009/10. This is

considered likely to continue in future years in response to the Government & NHS demands for nursing at all levels to become a degree-only profession.

2. University of Hertfordshire

The University's BioPark in Hertfordshire embraces a 7,500 sq m biological and chemical laboratory research centre that now has 17 permanent tenants on site and 6 'virtual tenants'. Occupancy is now approaching 80% and recent companies that have moved in are a life science-related ICT company and a bioscience company. BioPark's second U.S inward investment moved in at the beginning of July. The BioPark is about to commence development of an additional 1,800 sq m of incubation and laboratory space aimed at encouraging the development of new start-up businesses – augmented by a comprehensive business support programme.

3. Writtle College

Writtle has seen a substantial increase in applications for its undergraduate and postgraduate provision with overall acceptances up 20% on the previous year. Within this increase the College has experienced a 150% higher demand for undergraduate business programmes and a 36% improvement in recruitment for postgraduate business courses.

4. University of East Anglia

The University has experience increased demand for Nursing Courses where, for example, a recent round of fast track applications targeted those looking to re-direct their careers. This generated 316 applications which resulted in approximately 40 offers. Additionally, demand for UEA PGCE Teaching Courses is currently 32% above 2008 levels and there is also increased interest for "subject knowledge enhancement" training for teachers.

(435 words)

C. Fall in demand/gaps in existing activity

Overview

Relatively little information has been received from the AUEE member institutions relating to a fall in demand. However, HEIs are seeking to identify any gaps in existing provision to enable new services to be developed when and where appropriate.

The Association has some concerns about the slow uptake of environmentally sustainable practices by some companies and organisations. Whilst at least two of this region's world class-leading universities are driving forward with new technologies that are helping to address climate change, the regional uptake has been disappointing. Inevitably this may be a direct consequence of the need to address efficiency savings for economic survival. It is recommended that a greater attempt should be made by regional and central Government to clearly establish and project the link showing how low carbon technologies can assist with company efficiency savings, thus lowering costs.

The following two case studies relate to an apparent fall in demand for some activity:

1. Anglia Ruskin University

The University reports that Hospital Trust budgets have been tightened and it seems that training funds now need to be provided by individual departments which they are finding very difficult to do. Similarly an ongoing survey of the demand for forensic science training in police forces and crime scene investigators suggests that demand will fall as a result of restricted funding.

Within Life Sciences, Anglia Ruskin has detected that CPD courses specifically identified for and developed for biomedical science have not been taken up as strongly as in the past.

2. Cranfield University

Cranfield University reports that there has been a downturn in short course demand in some areas. Whilst corporate client relationship building is going well it is now at a slower rate than expected and this is inevitably due to client uncertainty and reorganisations due to the downturn. However, Cranfield has recently launched its re-skilling website: <http://www.cranfield.ac.uk/sas/reskill/> that is being widely publicised and should lead to an increase in demand.

(321 words)

D. Partnerships and networking

Overview

The region's HEIs continue to develop and expand their regional and local partnerships, particularly with JobCentre Plus and the RDA. Examples include:

- The "how to grow your business and prosper" event held by the University of Essex that targets local businesses and is jointly organized by COLBEA (local enterprise agency) and Business Link. This University is also working with JobCentre Plus to evaluate the on-line skills assessment tool to be launched on VentureNavigator as part of their economic challenge investment funded projects.
- The Norwich University College of the Arts has been delivering support to disabled graduates, particularly those suffering from dyslexia, with JobCentre Plus.
- At Cranfield there has been an expansion of their established links with JobCentre Plus to assist in increasing awareness of programme availability.
- At the University of Bedfordshire there has been increased interaction with EEDA in relation to potential changes in the local automotive employment landscape.
- Writtle College is working closely with Chelmsford Borough Council on their 'Redundancy Initiative Supporting Enterprise' events and with JobCentre Plus to provide education to the long term unemployed.

Case studies:

1. Anglia Ruskin University

Anglia Ruskin is providing specific literature and briefing leaflets at all JobCentre Plus offices in the region, focusing on support available to unemployed graduates. Specifically their Faculty of Health & Social Care is increasing partnership activity with these Centres to ensure they are aware of open/taster days and can signpost redundant/unemployed clients to where appropriate.

Within the Anglia Ruskin's life sciences provision an increased range of vocational courses have been developed (e.g. equine, pharmacy etc) in association with the College of West Anglia and Peterborough Regional College. In this context the University has appointed a co-ordinator to harmonise activities in widening participation for all vocational courses.

2. University of Hertfordshire

Based on the latest research in behavioural and cognitive psychology, Talent Key is a programme to help individuals increase their confidence and self-motivation to make the changes necessary to maximise their own potential. The University is working closely with Business Link to confirm the JobCentre Plus/Department of Works and Pensions pipeline for client referrals into this new programme. Clients will have access to one day workshops and individual follow-up on the second day. As part of the provision the clients will have access to one-to-one support as well as the mainstream Business Link programme. Each programme lasts 16 weeks, during which time the individual receives a supplementary payment of £50 per week from JobCentre Plus. The University also provides taster sessions for JobCentre Plus staff so that they are fully aware of the potential of the programme. An outcome of these sessions will be to tailor a handbook for use by advisers to assist with their referral process.

The University and Exemplas are working with graduates and businesses. The aim is to enhance the resilience of knowledge-based businesses, support their capacity to maintain and grow graduate employment and ensure the SMEs that they have engaged with and are in a position to take full advantage of the economic upturn. Objectives include working with partners to identify, engage with and assess the ability of knowledge-based businesses to adapt to become more sustainable. Also, to provide practical support addressing the business development needs for the current tightening economic climate.

3. University of East Anglia

UEA's work with the Enterprise Challenge Investment Fund includes signposting graduates looking to start up new enterprises to access the resources of Business Link. The University is working with TCHC – the organisation responsible for skills brokerage – including Leadership and Management, Train to Gain, and Response to Redundancy. UEA identifies with TCHC signposting opportunities and funding that can be used to support businesses accessing training programmes. They are continuing their ongoing sponsorship of the Norfolk Network and with district councils to deliver courses across the county and therefore ensure accessibility. In this context, Project Evolve has received 300 specific enquires from local authorities in recent months.

Other relevant initiatives at the University include the 'InCrops Project', funded by ERDF and EEDA, which aims to promote crop derived bio-renewable near market research, supply chain development and product development, thus helping local businesses and entrepreneurs exploit opportunities within these sectors.

(698 words)

Summary

The East of England business community embraces an above average percentage of SMEs and it is known from past recessions that entrepreneurial activity and business start-ups tend to increase during such economic downturns. It is therefore essential that this region's HEIs and their associated networks pay due regard to micro and SMEs whilst also servicing the needs and expectations of far larger organisations. The following is indicative of recent developments:

1. Collaborative Activity - AUEE

The region's network of HEIs continues to seek out collaborative opportunities that will add value to social and economic prosperity. There have been three recent examples of such activity that have been established during the summer months as follows:

1. On behalf of its members and in association with other regional partners, AUEE has been instrumental in the construction of the 'Guide for Graduates' at www.eescp.org.uk/supportforgraduates
2. AUEE has outsourced its GradsEast on-line recruitment service to a commercialised company so that GradsEast can continue to grow without making further demands upon funding from either the member HEIs or the Development Agency.
3. On behalf of its members, AUEE has successfully bid for ERDF money to support low carbon SKTPs within the region. This total package amounts to £6m spread over the next three years.

The AUEE network sees considerable value in collaborative ventures of this nature and further developments will be considered in the coming weeks.

2. Business Support for SMEs – University of Hertfordshire

The University has launched the EASIER (Environmental Advice for SMEs in the Eastern Region) project. This project is part-funded through the region's ERDF Competitiveness "low carbon" programme, EASIER is designed to support SMEs in the region to reduce their carbon output, and become more energy-efficient and competitive as a result. The project has been developed with Exemplas and the Building Research Establishment with the aim of reducing SMEs' carbon emissions by between 10% and 20%. Eligible SMEs in the region will receive up to 14 days of specialist, tailored environmental consultancy paid for by the project.

3. Added Value – Norwich University College of the Arts

In the past few years there has been an increase in the range of mentoring services that have been rolled out both nationally and regionally by professional bodies. Increasingly the university sector is developing sector specific dedicated mentoring services and this is typified by work at the Norwich University College of the Arts. Launched in April 2009 their mentoring programme unites students, graduates and industry alongside their Alumni Association.

4. Specific Sector Networks - Anglia Ruskin University

Believed to be one of England's largest providers of health and social care education, Anglia Ruskin University continues to develop their relationships with regional partners, schools and colleges to ensure a seamless progression route for students

from FE to HE. Such activity is invaluable in assisting those still at secondary school, as they make their career choices and select the most appropriate courses so that they are fully equipped for the challenges and opportunities that they will encounter. (499 words)

F. Summary remarks

The East of England's higher education institutions have responded in a proactive and highly professional way in catering for the current and anticipated needs of both individuals and companies as they face the opportunities and challenges caused by the economic downturn. There can be no doubt that the funding supplied by HEFCE under the Enterprise Challenge Investment Fund (ECIF) has significantly contributed to the many success stories outlined in this précis of regional activity. Nevertheless, those institutions that failed to benefit from ECIF funding are as fully engaged with the development and introduction of innovative and highly responsive new provision as those that received such support.

Setting aside the recent speculation in the Press that the recession may be coming to an end, there are clear indicators within the East of England that cautious optimism is returning to the business community. This can be demonstrated by an increase in business enquiries being made to the university sector, stronger support by SMEs for involvement with Shell STEP involvement and by the significant engagement with the Innovation Voucher schemes.

The HE sector will need to remain equipped and prepared to cater for the re-skilling needs of an increasing number of people who are likely to experience unemployment in the coming months. Also, the HEIs must continue to provide training provision and new skills to those still in employment, especially where their employers seek to diversify in order to remain competitive. It remains essential that the higher education institutions are adequately funded to enable them to continue to offer support in this way, whilst still able to undertake their various other strategic responsibilities.

There remains profound concern about the three specific groups where the effects of the recession have hit very hard. They are the third sector charities that offer considerable support to local communities, the many qualified eighteen year olds who seek a higher education but who have been unable to secure a place at college/university this autumn and also those who have obtained their first degree but who cannot find employment.

(340 words and total word count 2,792)

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