

## HERA Barometer



Name of regional association:

**Association of Universities in the East of England (AUUE)**

**A. Increased demand for existing activity**

Despite the publication of national figures suggesting that the country remains in recession, confidence in this region's economy is growing. Businesses are responding to a range of new opportunities offered by the region's HEIs. Indicative of this confidence, Cranfield University's business growth and Praxis Personal Development programmes are fully subscribed. In addition, all available places on their Economic Challenge Investment Fund (ECIF) supported re-skilling initiative have been filled and waiting list exists. Nearby at the University of Bedfordshire, their 'Basics of Building a Business' programme, run for local businesses and students, has seen an increase in attendance from start-ups compared to the same point last year.

The following case studies also demonstrate the increased demand:

*Anglia Ruskin University*

Anglia Ruskin continues to receive record levels of applications from those made redundant from the business sector in London and the South East. The University has agreed with the National College for School Leadership that their programme can be adapted to meet the needs of these people. Originally intended for those already working in schools, it can now be accessed by those from a business background.

The University also reports that recruitment to postgraduate courses supports anecdotal findings that graduates are staying in education and seeking to up-skill, rather than entering the jobs market. For example, their MSc in Forensic Science has recruited its largest ever number of students for the autumn 2009 start.

*University of Hertfordshire (UH)*

Increased demand has been experienced by the University for KTPs where UH typically offers around 20 at any one time. Six firm enquiries were received during October; several with a particular focus in the computer science and software fields.

Hertfordshire reports increased demand in short courses run by their School of Creative Arts. Classes range in scope including *Photoshop*, web design and animation. Returning and new student numbers are far higher than in 2008.

UH has experienced a greater number of final year students and alumni attending "recession proof your career" workshops with input from employers and careers consultants. Attendance at enterprise events is up 47% and registrations for Hertfordshire's business ideas competition are up 200%. UH reports an increase in graduate jobs being advertised with 160 vacancies compared with 134 at this time last year.

University of East Anglia (UEA)

UEA's Project Evolve focuses on middle/senior management training and development for those who have been or who are likely to be made redundant. 272 completed programmes have taken place with a further 164 individuals booked into future courses.

The first graduates on another of UEA's ECIF projects, their Graduate Intern Programme, have completed their placements and one has already been offered a full-time position. There are a further eight placements being advertised.

UEA's Business Plan Competition has been launched with 18 registrations for the business start-up workshop, 20 expressions of interest/applications well ahead of the deadline. Their Enterprise and Commercialisation advice has attracted a number of Student Entrepreneurs who have been mentored and are now trading. This support has embraced assistance from law and accountancy professionals.

Norwich University College of the Arts (NUCA)

NUCA's first graduate on their Internship project has already completed. With a further six starting there are currently nine internships running with four due later this month. The first round of their Mentoring for the Creative Industries has also already been completed and a new series of partnerships will commence in November.

NUCA's Brainchild Business Concept Competition offers a wide range of fully subscribed start up workshops and one to one coaching including:

- CV's, covering letters and job applications;
- researching & applying for exhibition opportunities;
- copyright & IP;
- freelance, self employment & business start-up;
- teacher-training options.

**B. Fall in demand/gaps in existing activity**

To date there has only been a slight fall in demand across the region for the courses and services offered by higher education institutions. Where falls have occurred it seems likely that these have arisen because:

- some employers have had to scale back their staff development programmes;
- individuals have less disposable income for community engagement studies.

For example, at Anglia Ruskin it has been noted that whilst employers remain keen to engage on identifying skills shortages within their workforces, and to develop CPD to address those shortages, they are far less willing to commit to funding training for their employees on an FTE basis. Generally they increasingly expect employees to undertake training in non-work time only, which fits only with part-time or short course provision and thus may not adequately fill the skills gaps.

Meanwhile at the University of Hertfordshire there has been an overall fall in demand for evening courses in language and cultural subjects that are targeted at the community. At Cranfield University their Management School has had to cancel their High Performance Business Teams Programme due to lack of take-up.

The region's HEIs continue to react flexibly to the ever-changing opportunities that exist and they are equipped with well developed networks that help identify any gaps in

existing activity. Where these are detected, the universities are responding both individually and collectively. Any barriers that may impede solutions tend to be addressed via the AUEE networks. For example, there was widespread concern for the many qualified eighteen year olds who were unable to secure a place at university/college this autumn and also for those who have obtained their first degree but who cannot find employment. Via these AUEE networks, specific web-based information has been prepared to cater for both of these distinct categories and is signposted to the graduates in the region.

At the University of Bedfordshire past demand from local businesses for short, full-cost consultancy projects focused on business growth has been impressive <http://www.beds.ac.uk/knowledgehub/casestudies> However, demand has fallen away during the recession leaving a market failure for this kind of intervention. There would appear to be a gap here that now requires some public sector priming.

### C. Partnerships and networking

AUEE continues to encourage and facilitate partnership activity that adds value to not only the region's HEIs but also to the relevant economic and social imperatives in the East of England. For example, the Association co-hosted a very well attended and acclaimed annual conference in October entitled 'Managing the changing landscapes of HE in FE'. Representatives from both sectors, along with key regional stakeholders, came together to discuss shared areas of interest and opportunity. AUEE has also facilitated specific relationships between its member HEIs and with TCHC, the organisation responsible for skills brokerage – including Leadership and Management, Train to Gain, and Response to Redundancy. The following are indicative of other regional partnership and network interactions:

#### Writtle College

Writtle is working closely with Chelmsford Borough Council's Redundancy (RI:SE) programme where numbers are increasing by about 20% as people fail to return to employment. The College has approached several other authorities with a view to starting similar redundancy initiatives in their districts, the most advanced of which is in Maldon where there will be a launch later this month.

The College is working with Jobcentre Plus at their daily 3 month compulsory interviews for the unemployed in Chelmsford. This work is expanding to two adjacent towns. In-line with its ECIF responsibilities, Writtle is working with the East of England Skills and Competitiveness Partnership, the East of England Development Agency and the LSC in offering support to those faced with redundancy, an area where the College has seen rapid growth that is expected to continue into 2010.

#### Cranfield University

The University's Business Development Incubation centre has engaged with Business Link to deliver a drop in surgery-day for regional businesses during Global Entrepreneurship Week (16 – 20 November 2009). This has been promoted via the Bedfordshire County Council events programme. Also, their School of Management has delivered an evening seminar for local small businesses from the Milton Keynes Sparc Network where attendance was higher than projected. Cranfield's involvement with the 'Response to Redundancy' programme with Central Bedfordshire Council continues.

#### University of Hertfordshire

The University of Hertfordshire has experienced increased interest in, and submissions from, the creative sector in the innovation voucher scheme as operated

by EEDA with between 50-60 already approved and awaiting confirmation of other successful applications. Such interest from businesses has also been detected by the University through the increased attendance by organizations looking to recruit graduates at their Careers and Recruitment event.

#### University of Essex

The University has joined forces with Essex Chambers of Commerce to offer 'Essex Business – The Skills to Succeed' programme. The programme is designed to ensure that businesses have access to the skills necessary to compete successfully and emerge as winners. Essex has also developed its 'Introduction to Leadership' programme that was launched in October. This is delivered by a senior academic who is also a Fellow of the Higher Education Academy, and who in 2008 received the University of Essex Excellence in Teaching Award. All of the University's networking and partnership events held during the autumn have been fully subscribed by representatives drawn from businesses and organizations across the region.

<p>D. New or re-purposed schemes to address the current and forthcoming economic situation: transition to economic recovery</p>
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As stated earlier in this report, the first of the region's intern programmes are being completed with strong demand from both graduates and companies/organisations that they should continue. The following case study from the UEA emphasises the significant value of such activity:

#### University of East Anglia

The University of East Anglia's Evolve Intern programme places recent graduates with businesses and public sector organisations within Norfolk, with support funding available for Norfolk based small and medium-sized businesses. Placements run for between 10 - 12 weeks and can be in any industry sector. Companies have used the programme to investigate new services, research and develop new products, launch ecommerce websites, build bespoke software, streamline processes and deliver benefits throughout their organisations. [www.evolvernorfolk.co.uk](http://www.evolvernorfolk.co.uk)

UEA reports that a Norwich based media company is reaping the rewards of its early involvement with this new Intern programme. It was when Digital Media identified an urgent requirement to undertake a copy writing project that they turned to the University's Evolve Intern programme, which is helping organisations develop new products and service during the recession, whilst providing valuable new skills for the employed graduates. Through this scheme a graduate has been able to launch her career in a way that not only provided real life experience but also offered the opportunity to put her skills in front of a potential employer. The graduate had such a positive impact on the Company that they have offered her a job at the end of the internship.

The following two case studies are indicative of other new and re-purposed schemes:

#### University of Bedfordshire

The University of Bedfordshire's Knowledge Hub launched their 'Supporting Graduates in Employment' programme in September. This is co-financed by the European Social Fund in partnership with Central Bedfordshire Council and Bedford Borough Council. The programme provides free leadership and management training to graduates living in Bedfordshire and offers access to the Certificate in Leadership and Management from the Chartered Management Institute (CMI) at Level 5. The first course proved to be fully subscribed with delegates from a variety of organisations ranging from hospitals, solicitors, carpentry firms and fitness companies. Training is

open to all graduates, regardless of when they completed their degree, who work in SMEs or public sector companies, or those who have been made unemployed within the last six months. Employees within SMEs can also be accepted if they have work experience equivalent to graduate level.

#### Low Carbon SKTP programme

Following AUEE's successful application for European Regional Development Funds, a low carbon SKTP programme (LowC-SKTP) will be rolled out across the region by Anglia Ruskin University from the start of 2010. This programme has been specifically constructed to offer a new dimension to an existing scheme that will assist SMEs to respond to the opportunities arising from the downturn. The project aligns with ERDF Priority Axis 1 – Innovation and Knowledge Transfer and it meets several goals from the Regional Economic Strategy. Selection criteria have been grouped into four thematic areas:

- Technology Development/Adoption
- Process
- Behavioural Change
- Longevity and Reuse

E. Other
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#### HEIs Working with Suppliers

A recent EEDA coordinated approach to economic and social recovery has been 'Destination Growth' that kick-started Enterprise Week for the East of England on 3<sup>rd</sup> November 2009. Hosted from the world-class air museum at Duxford and with key note speakers including Sir Alan Sugar and Greg Dyke, the event provided 800 SMEs the opportunity to interact with a range of services and expertise including those from universities. It offered delegates the tools and confidence to not only see-out the downturn but also a fresh look at surviving and thriving in a recession. As an exhibitor, AUEE detected an improved level of confidence from SME representatives; a view was shared by a number of universities exhibiting at Duxford, all of which were pleased with the significant level of firm enquiries.

As a more specific example of an HEI working with other agencies, the University of Bedfordshire partnered with London Luton Airport, Luton Borough and Central Bedfordshire Councils and the Bedfordshire and Hertfordshire Chambers' of Commerce to facilitate a 'Meet the Buyer' supply chain event. Held in September and attended by over 100 local businesses, the event was highly successful. The University prepared companies for the event by hosting a training day on presenting successfully to suppliers. Contracts have already been signed by a number of suppliers.

<http://www.beds.ac.uk/knowledgehub/entrepreneurship/Meetthebuyer>

#### HEIs Working with HEIs

It is clear that several HEIs including the Norwich University College of Arts are interacting strongly with their Alumni Associations, both where past students are turning back to their HEI for support with re-skilling and also where they are offering help to one another via mentoring and/or internships.

A number of the region's universities continue to interact successfully with the NCGE. Events such as at the University of Hertfordshire's '*Herts Make it Happen – Flying Start*' organized in conjunction with NCGE, have been very successful in supporting unemployed graduates.

All HEIs have reported strong demand for their ECIF open days, recruitment events, and specialist activities. For example, 'Sustainability Live' offered from Cranfield University and the series of business clinics at Writtle College have been well attended as businesses and graduates recognise the benefits of working closely with HEI's, especially in these economic times when new business opportunities can be detected.

In many cases HEIs are sharing good practice and market opportunities in order to maximise their ability to offer meaningful and timely responses. For example, the ways in which the Norwich University College of the Arts works closely with the University of East Anglia. UEA in turn, in joint partnership with the University of Essex, embraces responsibility for University Campus Suffolk in Ipswich. Equally, Writtle College is working closely with Anglia Ruskin University and the University of Essex to ensure any business enquiries are responded to by the most appropriate Essex based HEI.

#### Other HEI Events

As another example of events aimed at the dissemination of best practice and at eroding any barriers to success that may exist, AUEE is facilitating an ESRC sponsored seminar at the University of Essex that addresses the various facets of the impact of research in social sciences.

#### Barriers

AUEE believes that all member HEIs are working at or very close to full capacity and that the ability to respond to future imperatives may be severely hindered by a shortage of available staff. Nevertheless, all institutions are working closely to ensure that their existing high reputation of interacting with the region's business community is maintained and enhanced.

F. Summary remarks
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#### East of England Overview

Since the summer months there have been a number of indications to suggest that confidence is returning to the East of England's business community. Undoubtedly stimulated by ECIF support, the university sector institutions have been offering a greater range of business support and re-skilling packages that have attracted far more business enquiries than at this stage last year. The volume and nature of the enquiries made at 'Destination Growth' in early November indicated that many businesses appear more optimistic than they were during the summer months.

#### Collaboration and Networks

The region's HEIs continue to grow their networks and to collaborate wherever possible in order to add value to the economic and social fabric of the East of England. Indicative of recent collaborative activity, AUEE members agreed to out-source the management of the region's web-based graduate employment service GradsEast so that it can become more responsive to the needs of both employers and graduates. The service is growing strongly and it has already engaged with a number of large scale employers seeking to recruit graduates. <http://www.gradseast.co.uk/>

#### Cross-Regional Linkages

Representing its member institutions as well as all other Higher Education Regional Associations, AUEE attends the Institute of Knowledge Transfer (IKT) Board meetings. This network is proving to be invaluable in not only helping to disseminate IKT news to members but also to feed back to the Board recommendations that will enable IKT to develop sustainability.

Impact

The East of England universities are well aware of the importance of their impact upon both the regional and sub-regional economies, as well as their social responsibilities. As detailed earlier in this report, many of the university sector services have been developed to support the business community and these have been well received and fully subscribed. Many businesses, especially SMEs, are now interacting with an HEI for the first time and from this initial relationship it is likely that longer term interactions will flow. The universities are aware of the need to measure impact to seek out new forms of engagement that remain effective and which offer long-term solutions.

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