

HERA Barometer

Name of regional association:

Association of Universities in the East of England (AUEE)

A. Summary of schemes introduced, or significantly re-purposed, to address the economic downturn

Every HEI has introduced new opportunities and re-engineered existing schemes in order to address the potential impact of recessionary times on both businesses and individuals. HEFCE's ECIF support has played a considerable role in both broadening and speeding this process, thus ensuring that the higher education sector maximises its potential to assist with the economic recovery.

University of Bedfordshire

The University reports the continuing success of their Management Development and Maintaining Employability programme for 100 graduates employed in Bedfordshire based SMEs. This is free-of-charge to participants with funding support and the partnership of two local unitary authorities. Recruitment success has been delivered primarily through networking opportunities with partner organisations such as FSB, Chambers etc.

There is on-going work at the University's Enterprise Hub with innovation clinics and an IP advisory service. Emphasis is placed on supporting new knowledge-based businesses and a recent Innovation Day was attended by over 150 people and visited by the Chancellor of the Exchequer. The Hub builds on a successful partnership with EEDA and Unitary Authorities.

The University's Graduate Internship programme received over 100 expressions of interest from businesses and 41 internships have been offered to date. Some businesses are currently reluctant to proceed, with the scheme being seen as a route to longer-term employment as much as an opportunity for a short-term period of graduate input.

University of Essex

The ECIF funded 'transferable skills assessment', hosted by VentureNavigator, has been created to help people test how transferable their work/personal skills are, and to help develop their career portfolio. It is being promoted both locally and nationally. Over 6500 interventions (assessments completed, on-line skills resources accessed) have been delivered.

A 'question-time' type event was held in partnership with the Colchester & Essex Business Agency, Colchester 2020 and the FSB to gauge the views of how the main political parties propose to support business during this time of economic uncertainty. Another event, "How to Grow Your Business and Prosper" was jointly hosted by Colbea, the Business Café and Business Link where an audience of 150 heard from speakers who covered topics including Finance for Growth, Growth through People, and Growth through Sales.

The ECIF short-work placement scheme for current Essex students and recent graduates continues with 19 current placements and arrangements for another 22 under discussion. 70 local businesses are signed up, over 200 students/graduates are on the database and over 600 students have expressed an interest on Facebook.

University of Hertfordshire

The University has enhanced their impact on local and regional organisations by taking a step back to assess what additional support could be provided. In doing so, Hertfordshire has maximised the value of their existing partnerships including those with Business Link, Jobcentre Plus, Chambers, IoD, Society of Chartered Accountants and local colleges. All parties now have a better understanding of the services and support that is on offer. The re-evaluation has forged closer links for co-operative working in the future, thereby adding to the greater good of the community.

Other activities include a re-evaluation of the services offered by Graduate Futures to ensure it includes advice and support for graduates and *alumni* facing redundancy or continued unemployment. Subsidised postgraduate courses have been launched and increased demand for creative industries short courses detected. Additional enterprise and entrepreneurial support has been provided, resulting in an increase of over 300% in the entry numbers (39 to 130) to the University's business ideas challenge with accompanying workshops, incubation space and mentoring for individuals looking to run their own businesses.

Norwich University College of the Arts

NUCA's Brainchild Annual Business Idea Competition has completed its second round. The high standard demonstrated the effectiveness of the mentoring delivered by sponsoring businesses and there is no doubt that media coverage of the recession increased the number of students attending the free workshops.

A recent Graduate Enterprise Networking Event was held where graduates listened to speakers and meet other graduates looking to start businesses. It interacted with external support organisations such as Norfolk and Waveney Enterprise Services and the Women's Employment, Enterprise and Training Unit. A 'Creative Futures' 2-day event took place in April as a response to feedback from interns and mentors on how prepared graduates can enter the professional workplace.

(699 words)

B. Increased demand

While the full extent of the economic downturn may yet impact upon public sector employment, to date the effects of the recession have had a relatively limited effect on the business community. This region benefits from a mixed sector economy where there is no strong regional identity. With this backdrop, there remains a good and apparently growing demand for most existing schemes. Certainly the level of enquiries for KTPs and the Step scheme have increased and all HEIs report that the latest round of the East of England Development Agency (EEDA) Innovation Voucher scheme has met with a stronger demand from SMEs.

Cranfield University

All 146 available places were filled on the Cranfield School of Applied Sciences ECIF funded re-skilling initiative that focuses on marketing and advertising. Demand was so great that a reserve list was maintained in case any places became available after the course had started. The University's School of Management Business Growth Programme, that offers tailored provision to SME's facing significant challenges as a result of the economic climate, remains fully subscribed as do the School's Praxis Personal Development programmes. Cranfield's upward trend in Masters-level enquiries and applications continues to date from the 2008 baseline.

Norwich University College of the Arts

NUCA has eight new mentoring partnerships under way. Additionally they have 16 completed internships, 6 further internships confirmed and are currently recruiting. An additional 25 internships are available to NUCA through the Government's Graduate Internship Scheme. The College sends out a Graduate Opportunities email weekly, detailing job vacancies, internships, opportunities for submissions, competitions, freelance work and professional development courses. Their Graduate Mentoring scheme, in partnership with Evolve (UEA), has received 43 applications for 25 places, compared to last year when they received 14 applications for 15 places.

Anglia Ruskin University

Anglia Ruskin's graduate internship programme is proving popular with both businesses and graduates. It is evident from the number of new registrations of graduates in the last two weeks that this year's graduates are experiencing difficulty getting permanent work. They are registering for internships in the hope of gaining some useful work experience as early as possible in their post-HEI career. Many of those registering are doing so having already completed a postgraduate qualification, suggesting they stayed in higher education last year in the hope that the economic recovery would have been stronger by now.

As there has been little mass redundancy in our region, support offered by the University has been redirected into supporting local businesses with consultancy vouchers under the ECIF programme. Response from businesses to the Scheme has continued to be strong, especially from SMEs who regard this is a low risk, low cost and low commitment way to obtain the benefits of graduate level skills for specific

short-term needs in their businesses. To date, 20 graduates are currently placed in or have completed internships and the University is currently at the short-listing/interview stage with a further 50 companies with new enquiries arriving daily.

University of East Anglia

As part of the HEFCE Economic Challenge Investment Fund, 1316 registered participants have completed units within the Evolve programme. Of these, 550 are recent graduates, 470 redundant or at risk managers/professionals and 296 are businesses. Under the Graduate Internship scheme 124 businesses negotiated with the scheme, resulting in 33 graduates placed with organizations (26 with SME's) and 28 intern placements currently being advertised. Other activities include PhD and Post Doc Enterprise Training, and a Business Fellows programme to help develop commercialization skills for early stage researchers. In February, 200 attended a UEA hosted networking event with significant SME's attendance, resulting in ongoing collaboration discussions.

(599 words)

C. Fall in demand/gaps in activity

Several of the region's HEIs experienced a fall in demand for some CPD courses during 2009 but this trend now appears to have been halted. For example, whilst the last East of England report recorded that Cranfield University had cancelled their High Performance Business Teams Programme due to lack of take-up, no other programmes have been cancelled at that University. Indeed, there is evidence of increased demand in some areas such as Cranfield's Business Growth and streamlined Fellowship in Manufacturing Management Programmes.

Anglia Ruskin University

The University reports that employers are still keen to engage with them on identifying skills shortages within their workforces and to develop CPD and other training to address those shortages, but 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 courses and may not adequately fill the skills gaps. This trend is continuing. Also, as it has become evident that mass redundancies on the scale anticipated two years ago have not been occurring, so plans to develop training and employment programmes based on this have not come to fruition. For example, a large aerospace manufacturer in Cambridgeshire anticipated mass redundancies amongst automotive manufacturing industries in the East of England Region and was working with Anglia Ruskin to develop a work-based foundation degree to retrain such people to work in their business as they anticipated an increased demand for their products. Neither the redundancies nor the increased demand have happened and the retraining plans have been shelved.

(267 words)

D. Partnerships and networking

Across the region, several universities have experienced increased working with partner organisations such as the Federation of Small Businesses and their local Chambers of Commerce. Co-hosted events between HEIs and these partners have been very well supported as typified by the University of Bedfordshire's sub-regional Innovation Day that was held in April and which attracted over 150 delegates. Also, the University of East Anglia's work with TCHC, the organisation responsible for regional skills brokerage, where the University assists with signposting opportunities and access to funding to support businesses accessing training programmes.

University of Essex

The University's Business and Management Training Centre has continued its alliance with Essex Chambers of Commerce to offer its members and businesses in the region the opportunity to up-skill through 'Essex Business – The Skills to Succeed' programme. Two training courses, 'Motivating the Workforce' and 'Building Great Teams', were held in February and attracted a number of participants from the region. 'Knowledge Is Better Than Guesswork – How much do you really know about your customers?' was the second networking event hosted by the Business and Management Training Centre during 2009/2010. 40 people from businesses and organizations in the region took the opportunity to gain useful, practical insight and helpful tips from presenter Jeff Della Mura in January. Additionally, Jobcentre Plus has contributed to the evaluation of the VentureNavigator online skills assessments and is one of the partners that will be promoting these tools to its clients. Also, Business Link has been able to part fund extra workshops to take place at the University's Southend Campus with matched funding from HEIF. Workshops include:

- Business Growth
- Search Engine Optimisation
- Social Media & Networking

Writtle College

The College works closely with Chelmsford Borough Council on their Redundancy Initiative: Supporting Enterprise (RI:SE), to provide expertise and advice for those made recently redundant and who are seeking to increase their employability. A similar scheme has been setup with Maldon District Council called REACT. Writtle is continuing to work with Jobcentre Plus in facilitating demand-led courses and helping beneficiaries to receive additional training e.g. PRINCE2. ECIF funding has enabled Writtle to extend its networks and discussions have taken place with The Royal Institution of Chartered Surveyors (RICS) to explore mutual areas of interest. This combines the professional interests of RICS and the Landscape Institute through which the College's Design Courses are accredited. Working with the Essex Business Club, the College is supporting a number of businesses with workshops that will enable beneficiaries to claim CPD from their professional bodies. Writtle continues to

work with Maldon District Council in mentoring their Rural Coordinator, to assist them with managing their large rural estate, whilst continuing to network with partner organisations which comprise the Steering Group e.g. FSB, IfM etc.

Cranfield University

Cranfield’s ECIF supported enhanced links with the Hertfordshire Job Club and the R2R (Response to Redundancy scheme) through Central Bedfordshire Council have stimulated strategic level partnership building at senior management level. ECIF support also facilitated increased contact with the local Jobcentre Plus that has led to a higher value sustainable relationship being forged. The University’s Business Development and Incubation centre has engaged with Business Link to deliver regular drop-in surgery days for tenant companies and regional businesses. The School of Management, having delivered an evening seminar for local small businesses from the Milton Keynes Sparc Network in November 2009, is now developing an on-going seasonal programme commencing in 2010.

Anglia Ruskin University

Anglia Ruskin reports good demand with their graduate internship from companies that are generally willing to pay between £175 and £250 per week plus VAT. In common with some other HEIs, the University has invested considerable time in meeting with agencies such as Jobcentre Plus and Business Link but their own organizational structures make it difficult for them to engage fully with HEIs. However, the University has established a good relationship with one district council which has worked to create a network group of local businesses. The University has been able to design and deliver specific training sessions in response to needs identified by those local businesses, which are now reaping the benefits of this free training. Anglia Ruskin has also provided some training and support at events organized by other district councils, but these have been on a one-off basis rather than part of an organized programme of support.

(721 words)

E. Other

ECIF support has resulted in a number of additional benefits being accrued by HEIs from across the region. In some cases these are already leading to the development of longer term business relationships resulting in, for example, Classic KTPs. These knowledge transfer schemes, together with this region’s new ERDF funded Low Carbon sKTPs, featured in a series of presentations to business intermediaries at the Imperial War Museum at Duxford, organized by the AUEE. The Low Carbon sKTP scheme is managed by Anglia Ruskin University and it complements the national scheme by attracting additional funding into the region. A regional approval processes that ensure conformance with ERDF requirements has been agreed with the Technology Strategy Board and proposals from any knowledge base can be considered, not merely those within the region.

The Duxford event attracted representatives from a number of professional bodies, banks, accountancy firms and other networks. The event was organised because in many cases, it is to such organisations that businesses often turn for advice in the first instance. It was clear that in many cases the representatives were unfamiliar with the range of HEI services on offer. The event, that enabled them to access a wide range of information about the scope of HEI/business interactions, will be repeated in the autumn.

AUEE is responsible for GradsEast, the East of England's graduate recruitment website, that has been managed by Graduates Yorkshire for the past 8 months. During this time it has been re-branded and since the recent re-launch, more than 1,500 graduates having signed up and nearly 800 graduate jobs have been advertised with a significant uplift in web traffic.

AUEE has revitalised its own website that now includes an 'Ask Uni-East' function <http://www.uni-east.ac.uk/ask-uni-east>. This free service enables relevant enquiries from both businesses and individuals to reach all of the East of England's university sector business development offices. The Association also manages the region's Technology Transfer Group and the KTP Managers' Forum, both of which have recently embraced reports of an increased level of enquiry and interaction between businesses and member HEIs. Finally, AUEE produces a bi-monthly e-zine, that is circulated widely to stakeholders, through which news of the extensive HEI/business interactions is projected.

HEIs retain an important role in stimulating business start-up by graduates and would-be community entrepreneurs as well as including provision of support for graduates considering self employment. This region's recent experiences suggest that, as in previous recessions, entrepreneurial activity and business start-ups are being stimulated and this is in no small measure due to the activities of the university sector.

(425 words)

Writtle College

ECIF support has resulted in the College now working with a leading manufacturer where it is undertaking trials on a new range of battery powered mulching mowers. This is indicative of the potential for subsequent KTP activity in the coming months.

Norwich University College of the Arts

NUCA is not alone in noting that it is difficult to access information about other HEI's graduates in our region. NUCA has used its own destination surveys to target their graduates and there have been discussions with UEA regarding other resources to identify other graduates. They have also used postings on the Graduate Talent Pool website to show non-NUCA graduates our internship opportunities. This has helped NUCA to identify that over 37% of their 2009 interns are now in paid freelance or permanent employment. In common with other HEIs, NUCA is increasingly aware of the amount of staff time required to secure each internship. Ensuring that the most

appropriate graduate goes to each company is a good example of a necessarily lengthy part of the scheme and often exceeds the weekly staff allocation of 2.5 days.

Summary

- Any decline in demand for HEI services from individuals and businesses appears to have been arrested and an increased level of enquiry is detected.
- New and longer-term alliances between HEIs and businesses are being constructed and, in some cases, this will lead increased KTP/sKTP activity.
- This region's experiences suggest that, as in previous recessions, entrepreneurial activity and business start-ups are being stimulated.
- Opportunities exist to ensure that professional bodies, ranging from banks to membership organisations, remain up-to-speed with the evolving range of business and community facing services offered by the university sector.
- Organisational structures within some support agencies are such that partnership working with HEIs remains challenging.
- While the business sector demand for Graduate Internships appears quite strong, in some cases there remains some scepticism. Greater effort may be needed to project the true added value skills that a graduate can deliver to an SME, even where the Internship placement is only short-term.
- Further opportunities exist for AUEE to assist with the dissemination of information between member HEIs.

(786 words, overall word count 3,072)