

Demand led HE solutions for business – it really can work!

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Abstract

This paper demonstrates how the work of the Business Solutions Centre at the University of Wolverhampton has benefitted the regional business community, by bringing together strategic partners to work smartly together to embed knowledge transfer in organisations, successfully creating more sustainable businesses.

The University's research had showed that businesses were unsure which competing provider to contact when looking for help to grow, develop and finance their business. In response to this need the University brought together valuable, but often disparate activities of four major organisations, providing a 'one-stop-shop' collaborative model which delivers a comprehensive raft of expertise and services which can be easily accessed by businesses. This model is expanding regionally and internationally, whilst serving emerging/existing businesses in the city and the Black Country.

The Business Solutions Centre provides: 'demand-led' data back into academic schools to inform curriculum; a single point of access for multiple partner business support; and aims to develop life-long relationships with business.

The University considers this new model for industry engagement has brought a renewed drive to succeed in the region based on a shared vision and common goals. Enabling promotion of all our initiatives relating to business engagement through a single channel adds value.

1. Objectives

The University of Wolverhampton; partnership initiative working with other strategic business facing organisations via the Business Solutions Centre:

- Enable SME's to innovate through dissemination and integration of knowledge transfer
- Provide 'demand-led' data back into academic schools to inform curriculum
- single point of access for business support
- customer friendly front-end to its four partners' services
- providing customer-led enquiry handling and solutions engagement
- all partners pro-actively promote awareness of each other's services

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- developing life-long relationships with business.

2. Background and summary

The relative growth and significance of Small Businesses (SMEs) to the economy is clear as they account for over 99% of the UK's registered businesses and approximately 52% of UK's turnover. Furthermore, since the 1980's there has been a spectacular increase in the number of small businesses created and a remarkable revival in their role in the UK economy. This trend is mirrored in the West Midlands region where the number of SMEs continues to grow. SMEs are now more important than large firms in their contributions to employment and business turnover and have become a formidable business presence [1]. Arguably, this is largely due to changes in technology, consumer demand, and the drive for efficiency and flexibility, which has in turn led to restructuring and downsizing of large enterprises and the entry of new smaller firms. SMEs are an important audience for educators since they provide a source of innovation, in new products, services and work practices. A recent US study indicated that small businesses create over 50% of all innovations and that contribution is still growing

Established in 2010, the Business Solutions Centre (BSC) managed by the University of Wolverhampton (UoW) responds to reports such as the BIS 2010 'A strategy for sustainable growth' and Lord Browne's independent review 2010 'Securing a Sustainable Future for Higher Education in the UK'. In 2010 the University sought strategic partners for its work, which was further refined following Professor Sir Tim Wilson's 2012 'Review of Business-University Collaboration'. Our 'one-stop-shop' partnership is expanding regionally and internationally, whilst serving emerging/existing SME businesses in the city and the wider Black Country region.

Although there is a general consensus that SMEs are a vital part of the UK economy, relatively few develop to become large employers. This may in part be due to SMEs not getting sufficient learning support. However, this is changing. Small firms are seeking greater assistance to develop their knowledge base and take their business forward by identifying factors leading to growth and success. In this respect, the role of the University as an enabler is of pivotal importance. With a plethora of SME support being provided (Technology Strategy Board research (2009) demonstrated over 220 support programmes available) the 'knowledge transfer space' suffers from significant confusion and 'white-noise' due to many voices trying to reach the same target audience

Additional regional research (undertaken by SQW, commissioned by UoW) indeed showed businesses were unsure which competing provider to contact when looking for help to grow, develop and finance their business. In response to this need the University brought together valuable, but often disparate activities of four major organisations:

1. FE College
2. Chamber of Commerce

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3. Local Authority
4. University of Wolverhampton

The collaborative nature of the Centre delivers a comprehensive raft of expertise and services which can be easily accessed by businesses. Employees of each of the Centre's four partners offer all packages of support available within the partnership. The seven members of the Centre's management team are based at the University and drawn from all partners.

The objectives of the University's partnership Business Solutions Centre are:

- single point of access for business support
- the successful transfer of knowledge into SME's to accelerate innovation
- customer friendly front-end to its four partners' services
- providing customer-led enquiry handling and solutions engagement
- all partners pro-actively promote awareness of each other's services
- Developing sustainable long-term relationships with business.

The strategic importance of the Centre to the University is multi-faceted.

- The Centre creates income for the University from its engagement with industry. In 2012 income was at £3m, this is projected to double in 2013 and treble in 2014 compared to 2010 revenue streams. The University does not consider that it would have risen this high had it continued with its former lone approach via its former
- Competitiveness Centre, successful as it was. The annual income is targeted to increase as our global, as well as local, reach develops.
- The Centre enables the University to get its intellectual property out into a wider audience in the business community. The local business community is identified to be pre-innovation level, and thus more difficult for the University to engage with alone.

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- Through initiatives such as the Caparo Innovation Centre (itself a partnership with a major global diversification of industries), the University's engagement via the Business Solutions Centre enables work with businesses and investors to develop new products and technologies, taking a stake in the outcome and engaging its academics with SMEs – all in long-term relationships.
- The University has a commitment in its employability agenda to find opportunities for its students to gain meaningful work placements and employment. The Centre's interface with industry enhances these opportunities and has led to 20% more placements.
- It creates new opportunities for our academics to work with and in industry so that engagement is first hand and more likely to lead to long-term 'for business life' relationships that enable introduction to a wider range of support. Our latest appointment by the Black Country Local Enterprise Partnership requires us to place academics in micro and small SMEs to work alongside them in developing their skills for growth – something previously done by a raft of business consultants under initiatives such as Business Link.
- It serves the University's place as an economic driver for the region.

More widely, the University's relationships with UKTI and overseas academia have been enhanced by its partnership in the Business Solutions Centre, leading to overseas institutions and business looking to it to provide an exemplar for their own development. Across the UK, other universities such as Manchester Metropolitan, Teesside, Bristol and Hertfordshire have turned to the University and acknowledged the exemplar status of its Business Solutions Centre as a model for their own future business engagement.

3. SME access to Innovation

According to Porter [2] the ability to think strategically should be the first priority of the small business owner that is looking to grow. "There are no substitutes for strategic thinking. Improving quality, price or service is meaningless without knowing what kind of adjustment is relevant in competitive terms. Entrepreneurship unguided by strategic perspective is more likely to fail than succeed". Therefore, it is critical that SMEs have access to effective support in order that they can develop their managerial capabilities, particularly in strategic aspects. Strategy and formulation of this strategy are important aspects of a company's long term plans [3] and support in this area is critical for development.

The University considers that its partnership working with others through the Business Solutions Centre is innovative. Visits from other institutions and feedback from engagement relationships have highlighted just how different and exemplary our work has become. This new model for industry engagement has brought a renewed drive to succeed in the region based on a shared vision and common goals.

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Enabling the 'partnership' to promote all our initiatives relating to business engagement and growth through a single channel adds value to our own offer, but is more achievable by teaming up with other business knowledge partners who provide complementary support and vital assistance.

The development of capability through the acquisition of knowledge is of paramount importance for firms, since knowledge, if properly harnessed, can propel an organisation to become more adaptive, intelligent, innovative and sustainable. Furthermore, it has been stated that the only competitive advantage a small firm has in the 21st century is what they know and how to use it [4]. If the potential for economic and employment growth is to be realised and benefit an increasingly diverse population, significant investment in skills is required by both employers and individuals. Research indicates that increased investment in training and up-skilling by employers leads to a 4% increase in value added per worker and a 1.6% increase in earnings [5].

The on-going provision of training and skills development by SME's within the physical staff resource they manage can be argued as being one of the most important investments that they will make. Subscribing to lifelong learning requires an active involvement in Continuing Professional Development (CPD). An increasing number of managers are engaging with CPD through a planned and structured approach to professional and personal development. In today's knowledge intensive world, it can be argued that the only real source of sustainable competitive advantage is the ability to learn faster than the competition. Indeed, today there is a much greater expectation that professionals be both technically competent and managerially capable. Organisations are increasingly engaging in human capital reporting activities. However, it should be acknowledged that the value of knowledge transfer erodes over time. For instance, it has been suggested that knowledge gained through an undergraduate degree has an average life of four years before it requires updating.

4. Description of evidenced results and why demand-led working is successful

The basic structure of the University and the provision of its business facing services has not changed dramatically over recent years, but the manner in which it is delivered has. The use of the Business Solution Centre combined with access to advanced technology has enhanced learning support both in the region, and increasingly, with overseas markets. However, the modes of learning delivery and the processes for designing business knowledge transfer products and monitoring quality remain traditional in their approach. There is a basic model that is followed which consists of a physical location (BSC) where knowledge is housed, attracting SME students, delivering training and finally producing highly skilled employees. The process is highly production orientated, and lacks flexibility / customer focus. This structure impedes progress in capitalising on CPD opportunities. Furthermore, once SME students depart, there is very little ongoing contact between them and the University.

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With increasing internationalization of markets and convergence of communication and information technologies, if the current structure did not change to reflect these changes it could create a potential weakness for the University and the business facing organisations it collaborates with. Furthermore it could stifle its engagement with contemporary CPD related markets. To be effective this production-based orientation has needed to evolve into one where the University (and its BSC partners) positions itself as a knowledge and learning network. It has been suggested that the business facing activities of a University will no longer be best placed on a Campus, but would be better placed if they consisted of multiple, interconnected locations not only around the region, but potentially around the World. Individuals would no longer be required to “go to a physical building”. They would join a community, for knowledge transfer, lifelong learning and networking. This transformation effectively changes the production-based model towards a much more customer orientated one, focusing on regular knowledge transfer learning top-ups and networking. This model will also require flexibility in terms of its academic staff. The concept of knowledge professionals or practitioner academics linked into a learning network will mean that staff may need to be positioned in business facing hubs (BSC) or for overseas delivery, locations that have linkage into/or within supportive international research clusters. Increasing collaboration with overseas knowledge transfer organisations will increase the attractiveness of multi-location staffing.

The transition from a physical place of knowledge transfer/learning dissemination into a lifelong learning network will inevitably create tensions and challenges. Increasingly, the traditional physical building provision (BSC) will be an entry point for knowledge transfer learners to enter the learning network. However, to offer a genuine sustainable longer term proposition, the University will have to work hard to keep its contacts in the network once they leave the physical building, and to sustain that network by providing its members with the information, contacts, interactions, knowledge and learning that they need. Portals (and associated technologies) will provide a key facilitating role but to be effective the University will need to build a powerful infrastructure to transfer knowledge to an international community of lifelong learners.

It is clear that in the future the University's role in knowledge management and transfer could be pivotal for the development of capability within regional businesses, particularly SMEs. It is, however, important to recognise diversity in terms of SMEs behaviour and attitudes towards knowledge acquisition. The different mental models of individual firms must be considered, together with their personal understanding of knowledge management processes [6]. Furthermore, the potential for collaboration between SMEs to improve capability and knowledge transfer is significant [7, 8], reported success in establishing Knowledge Management systems in SMEs, that encouraged information sharing. Knowledge transfer through collaboration is highly effective for nurturing innovation. Therefore, there will be benefits for the University taking a pro-active position regarding collaboration in its widest context.

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The outstanding characteristics of the Centre are the ability for academia to engage with business in their world. We know SME reaction to academia can be negative, seen as too high brow and not relevant at grassroots or shop floor level. We believe that business can overlook the support available from the local council, can be disengaged with Colleges because a company does not recognise the need for up-skilling and may consider a chamber of commerce as being for 'suits and ties' not 'grease and overalls' – and a large majority of the businesses in the West Midlands are engineering, manufacturing and construction supply chain SMEs. It is felt that the BSC partnership model is more approachable and easier for businesses to engage with on their own terms. The Business Solutions Centre is seen as an 'honest broker' with an independent remit and no political or organisational axe to grind, so it is able to speak on behalf of local business to influence policy, deliver what businesses need and respond to funding criteria all at the same time. The target for engagement with industry, measured via enquiries received, started at 100/month and has risen to 133/month since 2010 (+10% pa). However, the Centre continues to average 300+ enquiries/month. At the same time, the University's engagement with industry via the Centre continues to grasp the opportunity to place graduates and postgraduates with employers, subsequently contributing to its Employability agenda of 'a placement opportunity for every student'.

It can be argued that the work we do is pivotal, or unique, because of the way in which we do it. Historically much of the support provided to UK business has been based on 'mapping and gapping' to find a niche for the provider, a 'touch and go' intervention model that had little lasting engagement and 'tick box' driven marketing to deliver the output criteria of a funding source. The BSC model is different. Through partnership front-end enquiry and engagement services we seek to find out what an organisation/entrepreneur wants and needs to help it grow and then through brokerage and true collaboration with the internal partners, a bespoke support package is created. The prime driver is engagement based on individual SME need and success is measured in supported assistance – individual parts of BSC may still be driven by funding outputs, membership development, etc. but our SME customer receives one-stop-shop access to the right business solutions.

The distinctive features of our work, focuses on collaborations between the University, Council, College and Chamber of Commerce. For a new or existing business looking to grow, the sum of these constituent parts is much greater than any single member could provide. An enquiry made to the Business Solutions Centre can deliver a multiple touch-point value-driven bespoke package of support all from one call or meeting. This includes:

- innovation development, research and development, hi-tech product development and prototyping, graduate placement, knowledge transfer, business incubation, leadership and management development
- local premises sourcing, incubator premises, recruitment services, funding and grants, public sector networking, public sector procurement support
- workforce up-skilling, apprentices, product development using a blend of both HE and FE

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- business community engagement, legal and insurance support, marketing and sector expertise, recognition through regional and national awards
- national and international outreach and networking beyond any one partner's individual contacts.

Recently (June 2013) the Solutions Centre won the highly prestigious Times Higher Education Award for Knowledge Exchange/Transfer initiative of 2013 gaining national recognition for the work at the Business Solutions Centre partnership and the results it is achieving. Its formation represents a whole-life engagement vehicle with businesses, whereas former models in the UK, such as Business Link, were 'touch and go' interventions. According to Griener's business model curve, businesses require help and support at five critical stages of their life-cycle [9].

It is vital that all stages of the business life-cycle are supported; at the start-up phase you need to reduce fear of failure, providing access to generic advice and guidance; when a business is within their mature phase access to market diversification and specific knowledge transfer areas.

As an example, our development of new start-up businesses which have lasted 12 months or more is running at 48% of all start-up enquiries received, with a fall-out rate of 25% failures in the first year – this represents a success rate of 2 in 3 new start-ups we support surviving their first year. In real terms, this represents 325 businesses out of 500 start-ups in three years. Different levels of fear relating to failure exist between males and females [10, 11] To help alleviate negative correlations from increasing, separate single sex sessions are held (as required). The way individuals evaluate business/entrepreneurial opportunities contains both positive and negative images of fear of failure and self-esteem which in turn influence their evaluation decision [12]

5. How the work is expected to develop in the longer term

Planned development in the UK; linking our regional BSC centre with other regions as our model spreads across the UK. Due to the nature of our partnership, the four organisational (University, Council, College and Chamber of Commerce) partners have established relationships with their respective peer organisations/branches, which accordingly help to spread news of the model and its achievements. This should lead to even greater collaboration between pockets of UK industry to develop local supply chains and business, and ultimately give greater scope to knowledge transfer practitioners ability to share and transfer knowledge; support entrepreneurship; and develop our business community and graduate/student base.

Through our work with other organisations we attract businesses who want to develop a life-long relationship and these are a part of the future strategy – as we see these businesses becoming ambassadors for our work and possibly mentors for others entering the process. Two examples of where we see such opportunity are the University's SPEED+ and KEEN programmes.

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Student Placements for Entrepreneurs in Education Plus (SPEED+) is a £5.8m project run by five universities across the region and managed by the University. It is aimed at giving help and support to students and graduates wishing to start their own business. SPEED+ picks up from a previous initiative SPEED WM which was very successful, and with new ERDF funding we expect SPEED+ to feed new entrepreneurial start-ups into the Centre's family of supported companies.

The Knowledge Exchange & Enterprise Network (KEEN) is a business improvement programme, part-funded by ERDF, designed to help West Midlands based SMEs increase their profitability and achieve growth through working with a regional university. There are 11 regional universities involved and the joint programme is managed by the University. It is aimed to bring support to businesses that are pre-innovation, whereas the normal Knowledge Transfer Partnership model is for innovation-ready organisations. Our engagement with businesses through this route enables us to introduce them to the wider opportunities of the Business Solutions Centre and the life-long relationship model, which the KEEN 6-24 month graduate placement does not engender.

Both SPEED+ and KEEN are examples of funded work that has a specific output-driven agenda that we can introduce companies to, then initiate a longer relationship that does not 'put them back down' once the funding output has been achieved.

Overseas development is currently taking place via strong links with UKTI, allowing us to encourage local companies onto trade missions, making introductions to overseas organisations seeking to find better ways of transferring UK expertise into their markets. We believe that our discussions with foreign banks, (E.g. HSBC, Bank of India), will also help to 'pull' us into off-shore development opportunities and partnerships. In addition to our established overseas linkages, we have recently established offices in Brussels and Poland, and are currently in discussion with relevant organisations in India and Nigeria.

Testimonials from those we work with and those who visit us suggest that our model is highly regarded and sought-after as a concept for others to adopt. Our regional and global reach is shown in the diagram in the background information supporting this paper.

6. IMPACT AND BENEFIT FOR THE INSTITUTION

6.1. Description of specific benefits for the teaching, learning or research activity of the institution that have resulted from the work

Our latest Regional Growth Fund funded project, via the Black Country Local Enterprise Partnership, is a good example of how the Centre brings new opportunity to the University. As a direct result of the Centres success we have been appointed as provider of their Skills Factory Regional Growth Fund initiative (worth circa £1m). The Black Country is one of the weakest sub-regions in the UK

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in terms of its education and skill levels, and businesses have difficulties in recruiting skilled employees. Through the Skills Factory we will place our academics directly into businesses to learn first-hand of their needs and how we can shape courses to match employer-led demand or place our graduates within their businesses to solve their needs – traditionally the route for engagement has been for employers to come to the University to discuss needs.

In response to employer demand, we have already established a new two-year Foundation Degree in engineering for those who entered industry via apprenticeships and BTec routes but want to develop their supervisory/managerial and process management abilities. This development stems from the industry liaison and feedback achieved through the Centre – employers wanted to build on and develop the resources they already had, rather than bringing in new graduates who did not know their business intimately.

Whilst working at grassroots level with local SMEs we can spot new ideas that need incubation and development beyond their capability. We introduce these to the University's Caparo Innovations Centre, sharing premises with the Centre, who evaluate potential and support companies and inventors to develop commercially viable ideas with access to rapid prototyping, research, development and related business/legal advisory support. The University enters into business relationships as a stakeholder to provide support and so the Centre can provide an on-going relationship through the company life-cycle. The Caparo Innovations Centre is itself a major collaboration with a global business.

Our new Visualisation Centre, funded through the £1.8m Innovation 1st programme run by the Centre, enables the University to use an innovative leading-edge facility to research and develop new communication skills in collaboration with local enterprise; and we have launched our Agile Office scheme to promote greater use of cloud-based technologies to advance the skills of local businesses who trade online, use e-commerce or identify a need for greater speed in their data processing. This facility is also linked with our existing rapid prototyping initiative to support manufacturers and engineers who require low-cost development of a product to increase speed to market of innovation.

6.2. Description of the impact of the work on the overall standing and state of the institution, inclusive of specific funding and leverage benefits

It could be easy to be overshadowed by a neighbouring city council with high profile figures like Lord Heseltine gaining national media coverage for their plans, however our work through the Business Solutions Centre with the City Council, College and Chamber of Commerce has been producing formidable results since 2010, and they are impacting positively both on the University and the other three partners in the Centre.

The Centre has introduced a huge shift in University culture for business engagement, from a traditional model of 'our way' and 'our courses' to 'your needs' and 'our solutions'.

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The Centre's work will impact upon all elements of our student's Higher Education experience. Through interaction in employer forums, work placements and acting as guest business speakers, our academic tutors will be better placed to teach and disseminate 'current' organisational skills via their taught curriculum. The curriculum received by students will be topical, relevant and aligned to the present and future state of the regional businesses that we serve.

Within the University's student charter it clearly states that '...every student will have the opportunity to undertake a placement'. The Centre acts as a business hub, drawing in regional companies; assessing their needs and requirements; then matching them with suitably skilled and knowledgeable students from our internal academic units to provide a physical and intellectual resource. The Centre creates more opportunities for us to fulfil our commitment to the students and increase their 'fit-for-purpose' objectives for employability.

In particular, the standing of the University locally has improved. Not only did we have the initiative for the partnership-based Business Solutions Centre, but we made it come into being. Our Pro-Vice Chancellor for Research & Enterprise, himself an automotive industrialist prior to joining the University, has become a member of the boards of the Black Country Local Enterprise Partnership and the Marches Local Enterprise Partnership, making our standing very relevant to the future of the region. The Director of the Business Solutions Centre has also been invited to sit on boards of various local and regional business engagement initiatives such as the Black Country Skills Advisory Board. The University is a member and patron of local chambers of commerce. These types of involvement ensure we have our finger on the pulse of local industry and regional development, and the Centre's vision and plans are fit-for-purpose to support employer needs for skilled resources and their development.

Our standing in the University community is rising through the recognition of others that we have created an exemplar vehicle to support and develop local and regional commerce and industry at grass roots level and in a collaborative model that provides 'one-stop' solutions to busy employers needing focused response to their needs.

On the wider front, we are developing new overseas working relationships that increase our existing international reach and influence. Our presence in Brussels with the Knowledge Economy Network (KEN) has established a working base for us located in an organisation that drives, demonstrates and showcases knowledge transfer in enterprise, entrepreneurship and education across Europe and globally. The University is only one of two UK universities invited to partake in KEN and our Business Solutions Director sits on its advisory board.

From the funding perspective the Centre has attracted new revenue and investment for the University and the partners to the Centre. From its starting point in 2010 when the Centre opened, an initial income of circa £5m subsequently dropped to £2.5m whilst the Centre established itself locally, regionally and

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internationally. However, that has risen back to over £3m in 2012 with projections of £10m in 2013 and £15m in 2014, and these projections are on target to be successfully delivered due to the expanding list of initiatives the Centre is now being appointed to deliver on behalf of others.

7. IMPACT AND BENEFIT FOR THE WIDER COMMUNITY

7.1. Description of specific results, both measurable and beneficial impact, delivered by the work beyond the institution at local, regional, national and international level

Locally, circa 300 businesses contact the Centre monthly, 1,500 have received business assistance, 700 potential new start-ups have received advice and of these 500 have become businesses, with over 300 remaining in business for the critical first year. In January 2013, BBC Midland's Today reported that Companies House data showed the City having a record number of business start-ups, bucking regional trends for setting up new enterprises (up 13.5% compared with neighbouring Worcester down by 24%) The programme interviewed three of the Centre's partners about our performance. The city and region benefit from the impact of 325 new start-ups lasting more than a year. As an example, those in construction are expected to generate £2.84 of economic activity in the UK economy for each £1 earned (UKCG report 2009) and 26% of the 1,500+ companies helped have been in construction.

Regionally, i.e. the Black Country and wider West Midlands, we have councils, chambers of commerce and colleges drawn to us to assist them in their work with business. Examples are the Black Country LEP's Skills Factory and the Black Country GOLD programme by two local councils.

Prior to our involvement, two local councils were each bidding for ERDF funding for their own programmes to develop micro and small SMEs that could not meet the high growth criteria of the Growth Accelerator initiative, however we were approached to assist one and brought them together to make a more powerful joint bid with the Centre as the delivery arm. The new initiative will become our Black Country GOLD programme (Growth Opportunities Local Delivery) – here our beneficial impact has been to create collaboration between the two councils and a single source contact point for businesses following our own successful and established model.

Another regional initiative that has been given to the Centre to manage because of our record of success is the Express & Star Green Shoots Fund. This is £1.4m of Government Regional Growth Fund for SME business which was bid for by the University and its partner the Express & Star Newspaper Group. The fund is to support 50 Black Country SMEs and create a minimum of 75 new jobs.

We have been entrusted with running the local £1m programme to assist ex members of the armed forces back into civilian employment and to support their dependents to establish new business start-ups.

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The University has secured funding for its BECCI programme (Built Environment Climate Change Initiative) which is a £1m two-year programme to stimulate and assist manufacturing and design organisations to generate new and innovative products for carbon emissions reduction in construction. The University has entrusted the delivery of this programme to the Centre because of the strong links it has forged with local industry.

Our national impact is as an exemplar of enhanced and more collaborative ways that support organisations like universities can engage with business. Many organisations that have looked at our model, such as universities and chambers of commerce have chosen it as a model for their own future engagement initiatives.

Our work internationally is growing, through our strong links with UKTI, the Knowledge Economy Network and the European Regions Research & Innovation Network. We have established three overseas initiatives in India, Poland and Nigeria to date and are working on the next three. These links are generating revenue for the University and the region, circa £4m for the University and £30m for the region to date.

7.2. Description of the nature and extent of replication of the work elsewhere and in pioneered developments on the wider stage, and the action taken by the institution to promote transfer of knowledge or practice in this country and overseas

The University has received many visits from other UK Universities looking at our innovative model as a basis for establishing a similar model for their own relationships with business. The testimonial in the background information is evidence of this.

In the UK we have regional councils, chambers of commerce and colleges seeking to adopt our model and partner with us, as they see the benefit of our collaborative model and the successful way in which this serves to transfer knowledge and expertise into businesses.

We have established overseas relationships worth around £5m of revenue to the University which are already set to generate around £30m or more of new regional business. There are three countries we are collaborating with to date, and are in negotiation with three more.

We partner with UKTI to help us promote our collaborative knowledge-exchange model. We have assisted them in getting our local companies to take part in trade missions to Virginia, USA, and Bangalore, India.

Late last year we staged a Global Business Day with UKTI, in our new Visualisation Centre (home to the UK's largest flat screen touch screen Tablet; 2,5m x 2.8m) where we brought in regional companies wanting to develop exports and take them through the world's business day by time zones, starting the day in

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Europe, moving through India, China and Australia and finishing in the USA – the UKTI Country Managers were present to make introductions to hosts and businesses overseas and then UK delegates decanted to side rooms and hold one-to-one video calls with likeminded overseas businesses. We also have a range of local MPs lined up to take part.

We have recently established a Polish office with Conversa Business Development in Poland, with a remit to attract 20 new businesses to the West Midlands region in 2013. The first of these, a food processing company, will be worth circa £20m/ya to Telford. We have appointed a graduate in a knowledge transfer role to provide the Polish company with a 'soft landing' in the UK by doing their advance research and agency work.

Our Indian partner, Industrial Development for Karnataka in Bangalore, offers the Centre's partner's knowledge and expertise to aerospace and technology sectors to support the emergence of UK brands in their region as manufacturing entities, such as Jaguar Land Rover and Moog. The arrangement also requires development of around 30% of supply chain capacity locally in the UK area where the centre is located, so there is a double benefit.

The value of revenue to the University is around £2m and to local UK business a minimum of £10m is anticipated as well as raising Tier 6 and 7 suppliers up the supply chain by supporting the application of the SC21 standard. Based upon our ability to provide in-depth support and knowledge transfer, we are currently in advanced discussions with an Indian motor manufacturer regarding the possibility of them establishing a plant in the City which would attract similar levels of investment to those recently made by Jaguar Land Rover.

We have a new alliance with the University of Maiduguri, Nigeria, where we are showing them how to develop a similar Business Solutions Centre to support start-ups, incubations, graduate entrepreneurship, etc. There are now three other universities in the region who want to form a partnership with us for similar reasons.

The revenue value to the University from these four partnerships is anticipated to reach £2m.

Our presence in Brussels with the Knowledge Economy Network specifically places us in an organisation whose purpose is to act as an enabler for driving knowledge out of FE and HE into industry. The potential collocation with ERRIN will make it easier for us to find European partners to work with on future funding bids and their resulting beneficial effects for the UK.

8. NEW DEVELOPMENTS AND DIFFERENT APPROACHES

8.1. Description of the innovative, original and distinctive features of the work

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The innovative characteristics of the Centre's work are the creation of a 'one-stop-shop' point of contact for local businesses to engage with its four partners. All of the partners have been educated in what the other three offer and so the degree to which cross selling is considerable. This has taken away a former issue for local SMEs who sought advice, support and funding but did not know who to approach for their particular needs – now they contact just one point and their needs are fed into the partners to create a bespoke solution, either collaboratively or from their own expertise and service offer. In University terms this has improved the reach for making placements through schemes like SPEED+, KEEN and KTP as the University is now more effective at identifying companies in need of this type of support.

What we consider to be original about the Centre is that it responds directly to industry feedback and needs, i.e. it is demand driven and not University driven or simply delivering on the agenda of its partners.

Although the four partners of the Centre may be driven by funding outputs, membership development, etc. the Centre's customer receives 'one-stop-shop' access to the right solutions to their individual need, or if we do not have that solution we work with other agencies to source it.

9. Conclusions

The traditional model for university engagement with industry has been sporadic and scatter gun in approach, with individual academics and faculties making their own approaches and arrangements. The Business Solutions Centre model is proactive and collaborative, is demand not supply driven and responds directly to the needs of businesses of all sizes, abilities and financial resources.

As can be seen from the information above, the University and its Business Solutions Centre has become a critical resource for local, regional, national and international enterprise support and assistance that is considered by peers to be an exemplar model.

We do not believe there are any comparable benchmarks for what we have established through the collaborative Business Solutions Centre. Our Destinations of Leavers from Higher Education (DLHE) data only relates to a part of what the Centre does, as our focus is wider than just the University's students and encompasses new business start-ups, employment of local community, up-skilling, inward/outward investment portal etc. Our 2011/12 DLHE is showing an increase over 2010/11 of circa 5%. Similarly our graduate employability figures have risen by a further 6% now residing at 90% (2012-2013)

10. References

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