

**POLICY REVIEW – FEEDBACK FROM VISIT TO
SHEFFIELD HALLAM UNIVERSITY**

REPORT OF THE CHIEF EXECUTIVE

STRATEGIC PRIORITIES: SP3: PROSPEROUS CITY

**CORPORATE PRIORITIES: CIO1: Delivering Customer Focussed
Services, C102: Being ‘One Council’, C103: Efficient and Effective Council, C104:
Improving partnership working to deliver ‘One City’**

1. Purpose

- 1.1 To receive feedback following the visit of the Committee to Sheffield Hallam University as part of its policy review into Aim 1 (University City) of the Economic Masterplan.

2. Background

- 2.1 As part of the policy review into Aim 1 of the Economic Masterplan, the Committee agreed to undertake a visit to Sheffield Hallam University.
- 2.2 The purpose of the visit was to receive an overview of the work of the University and in particular its impact on the city and regional economy. The visit also set out to consider the links between the University and the business sector and its approach to supporting the local economy.
- 2.3 The programme of the visit was designed to provide:-
- an overview of the University's role in economic leadership (City/LEP, etc);
 - a discussion of any research undertaken into the local economic impact of the University;
 - an overview of the process of engagement with business;
 - visits to 2-3 departments/facilities with the most developed business interface and to any specific start-up or enterprise activity/programme/facilities;
 - discussions with partners on the nature of University collaboration;
- 2.4 The visit took place on 24-25 November 2011. Members of the Committee in attendance included Councillor Michael Mordey, Councillor Dianne Snowdon, Councillor Ellan Ball and Councillor Peter Gibson. Members were accompanied by Vince Taylor (Head of Strategy and Performance) and David Donkin (Assistant Director Business Development) University of Sunderland

3 Current Position

- 3.1 During the visit, Members met with a range of representatives from the University and viewed a number of projects and initiatives on offer. A summary of the issues raised is set out below.

Professor Mike Smith Pro Vice Chancellor - Introduction

- 3.2 Professor Mike Smith, Pro Vice Chancellor for Research and Knowledge Transfer set the backdrop for the visit and provided an overview of the University's role in economic leadership.
- 3.3 He noted that the University had established and maintained a positive working relationship with the City Council. This relationship was based on openness and trust and recognition of the strengths that each party can bring. The University had traditionally been an active player in the local and regional economy and in more recent years had also developed links with the city's other University (Sheffield University) in order to maximise their combined impact on the city economy.
- 3.4 Professor Smith emphasised the importance of joint working. The University also playing a very active role in the Local Enterprise Partnership (LEP) and had worked closely with the previous Regional Development Agency. Professor Smith did voice some concern's that the lack of any direct budget for the LEP would effectively hinder its work and constrain its ability to manage the process of economic change and development in the city.
- 3.5 The University had always sought to maximise its use of the European Regional Development Fund and this was now the principal source of funding for new projects and initiatives in terms of the promotion of skills and enterprise.
- 3.6 During the years, the Universities location in the heart of the city and its expenditure on new buildings had been a central engine for the regeneration of the city centre bringing in substantial income and spending into the city. Sheffield University and Sheffield Hallam University had jointly commissioned a detailed piece of research into the economic benefits the two institutions brought to the city. Prof Smith felt that this had been a highly useful piece of work. A copy of this document will be forwarded for the Committee in due course.
- 3.7 The city had been particularly commended on the improvements made to the public realm - much of which had been delivered by the University. He felt that this was a concrete example of the University using its physical assets to help regenerate the city centre and the local economy.
- 3.8 The presence of a high number of international students was of considerable economic benefit to the city. As well as the direct economic benefit that they contributed to the economy while studying at the University, there was also the potential contribution they made when they subsequently obtained employment and were in a position to choose to direct investment back into the city.
- 3.9 Great importance was attached to making the best use of the specialist skills held within the University. However, Professor Smith argued that it was important to focus on those areas where there were genuine examples of excellence. Another central feature was the need to develop and maintain trust between organisations. Prof Smith felt that this was something at which the University had excelled. This

trust was more than just the trust that can develop between individuals but one that existed between institutions themselves. This trust had allowed the University to develop links with the national headquarters of major public and private sector bodies such as Railtrack, Rolls Royce and Sainsburys.

- 3.10 In developing the local economy it was important not to focus unduly on high tech areas of the economy and that assistance was of importance to all sectors of the economy that can help generate employment.
- 3.11 The University had a history of working closely with businesses in order to develop the training courses that they need (by co creation) in order that they can help to equip the local workforce with the skills required by local business. However, it was important that such courses were of high quality and respected and that their value and status was secured.
- 3.12 The issue of student employability was central to the University. This was reflected in the high priority attached to student placements and the employment support provided to students. For example recent graduates were provided with on going support for 2 years after graduation. The University had also established a business incubator to help students set up their own businesses.
- 3.13 The University has also had a traditionally strong reputation for the quality of its teaching and its research. Very important in this respect was the close links established with the NHS and local hospital trusts which had brought in quite substantial revenue for the University in recent years. Prof Smith felt that in coming years the health sector was likely to emerge as an ever more important area for potential growth, together with advanced manufacturing such as emerging supply chain industries.
- 3.14 The University has traditionally enjoyed high rates of retention of students coming into the areas from outside and choosing to stay, live and work in the city. Prof Smith felt that it was often of benefit for the Colleges' students to spend time away from the city following their degrees. In many ways the important issue was to get students to return later in life and live in the area. High retention rates were only of benefit if jobs existed for students leaving the University. There was some discussion as to the effect of recent increases in fees and whether this will lead to more students opting to remain in their local area choosing the University of their choice. Prof Smith also suggested that while in the past the university has tried to cover as many courses as possible, in the future and as resources become tighter, it may need to take a more focused approach and manage expectations of what can be delivered.
- 3.15 Prof Smith recognised that for the University sector, as with most sectors of the economy, the future would be challenging and that it was important that expectations of what could be achieved were realistic.

Sheffield Business School – Knowledge Transfer

- 3.16 Stephanie Sturges, Senior Lecturer and Siobhan Newton, Knowledge Transfer Champion noted that one of the aims of the Sheffield Business School was to develop the entrepreneurial spirit of students and work with local businesses looking for help and assistance.

- 3.17 The School provided business expertise and practical applied research across commerce, industry and the public sector. The emphasis was on adopting a flexible approach and tailor student learning plans and business solutions to the needs of individuals and organisations. The School worked with both SME's and large organisations and an important feature was the level of collaboration between Sheffield University and Sheffield Hallam.
- 3.18 The School could identify a new graduate to carry out a one to three year project for a company. This could involve the development of new products, streamlining manufacturing processes, design marketing strategies and developing new systems. So far, the university had set up successful partnerships with over 100 businesses and helped them get funding to cover some of their costs.
- 3.19 In terms of the knowledge transfer programme, this scheme brought together participants from the public and private sector in order to tackle a particular issue – two examples being the approach taken to city centre management and the public/private benefit of holding major events. This provided a good opportunity for partnership working and provided an opportunity to challenge existing working practices and assumptions. At a time of constraints of funding the Programme also provided an opportunity for joint working and collaboration in fresh and innovative ways.

Innovation Futures – Materials and Engineering Research Institute

- 3.20 Alex Prince noted that the Materials and Engineering Research Institute (MERI) was established in 1990 to bring together a multi-disciplinary team of researchers to promote high standards in materials and engineering research.
- 3.21 The Innovations Futures Project was a three year programme involving knowledge transfer between businesses with the University offering its specialist expertise and knowledge. The project was made up of 10 staff but there was an opportunity to buy in expertise from academic experts across the University. There were over 200 projects for the industry each year, ranging from a few hundred pound companies to multi million pound research projects.
- 3.22 The project worked closely with local SME's though one of the lessons learnt has been the benefit of also engaging with the larger companies where one can often have more effect and a greater benefit by working with larger businesses.
- 3.23 The difficult economic climate had made it difficult to achieve targets in relation to jobs created. The project often found that work has helped to solve a particular problem of a firm but that this has not necessarily helped to create new jobs. In retrospect it was felt that there needed to be a clearer understanding of how you define the success of a project.

Design Futures

- 3.24 John Kirby, Creative Director noted that Design Futures work with industry on packaging and the design of products, bringing a wide range of expertise from the University to solve particular problems.

- 3.25 Staff members possessed a range of skills including those from the private sector which allowed the development of something that was unique but also manufacturable. The project had had considerable success with a number of private sector clients, including packaging for M&S, Twinning Tea, King meal Bread and Waitrose. The project concentrated on the use of renewables such as paper and cardboard as a basis for packaging and was able to keep costs down by using expertise available in house.
- 3.26 However, the project was not about maximising profits but providing links with local businesses and opportunities for students to gain design experience. The promotion of the project depended a lot on word of mouth from satisfied customer and referrals from business link.

Materials and Engineering Institute

- 3.27 Dr Nick Farmilo, Business Development Manager referred to the importance of ERDF as a source of potential funding. It was important to be sensitive to the real needs of local businesses and not simply what you feel their needs should be. He also suggested that the focus should not only be on high tech and software. There was also value in helping smaller firms in the more traditional sectors of the economy which can help to provide sizeable levels of employment.
- 3.28 One issue that needed to be considered was the amount of time spent on marketing the service as against providing help and advice. Often firms were unaware of where and from whom to seek advice. It was therefore important to actively identify the people who need it. Reference was made to the benefits of holding a large event or a forum in an accessible venue that can attract those firms who do not normally engage.

The Hatchery Business Incubator

- 3.29 Sheila Quairney, Business and Enterprise Manager and Charmaine Myers, Director of Venture Matrix noted that the Hatchery Business Incubator was established in 2007/08 to provide support for people who were interested in starting a business. The scheme allowed students to set up mini projects and work with other students to support one another. The scheme was designed to develop useful and practical projects but also develop a person's employability skills and make them more attractive to potential employer.
- 3.30 There was also scope to offer start up grants, offer to one advice and guidance and offer space and facilities to allow students to develop ideas. Where a student had developed an idea for a product then further support was from a local engineering firm (Grapple) to provide advice for the student.
- 3.31 The scheme also provides support for students to run their own businesses in the college but it was important that students make the completion of their degree a priority. However, it was recognised that setting up a business or learning the process of setting up a business could be better work experience than many short term jobs in the retail sector.
- 3.32 However, it was recognised that the current economic situation was not favourable for setting up small businesses and that setting up a business was difficult and risky

move. Students were therefore made aware from the outset of the difficulties involved and it was recognised that self employment was not an option for everyone

- 3.33 Members undertook a brief tour of the Business Incubator and took the opportunity to speak to a number of students.

Tour of Sheffield Hallam University Campus

- 3.34 In conclusion, Dave Furniss, Deputy Head of Estates Operations provided members with a brief tour of the campus and an outline of its development since the 1990's.

4. Recommendation

- 4.1 The Scrutiny Committee is asked to consider the issues raised during visit of Sheffield Hallam University.

4. Background Papers

None

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