



Collaborating with industry

The Centres of Industrial Collaboration (CIC) network places the region's eight universities at the heart of economic development and provides a means through which businesses can access university research and development departments to create and improve new commercial materials, products and services. The £11m project offers access to knowledge and equipment which, small businesses especially, could never afford to buy outright.

The network consists of 11 CICs plus one affiliated centre with world-class research teams, led by internationally recognised academics. They cover the engineering, medical and healthcare, materials, food, chemicals, environmental technologies, digital and electronics sectors. Should one CIC be unable to solve or support a specific business issue, companies are transferred to another centre, or a more appropriate research team within a university. CICs also give students experience in industry and commerce; each CIC runs a marketing campaign aimed at communicating its services to the immediate business community, and has a full-time commercial manager who understands industry needs and can communicate on industry terms.

Since their launch, CICs have worked on more than 1,500 projects, grossed more than £38m of income and created or safeguarded around 1,400 jobs. The Materials Analysis and Research Services (MARS) CIC at Sheffield Hallam University and Medical House PLC developed the first needle-free insulin injection system, now available free to Britain's 500,000 diabetics. Briton Engineering Developments worked with the Polymer CIC at the University of Bradford to develop and improve Snowflex, an innovative ski and snowboarding surface. The Polymer CIC was able to ensure Snowflex mimicked real snow more closely - sales have since gone up by 80%.

CICs are committed to collaborating on innovative products that get to market quicker, are more cost-effective and are created to succeed in increasingly competitive global marketplaces. The impact of the CICs has been significant - not only in the UK but also overseas. At home, the project's success has created a model for how research platforms can be used to help industry. Further afield lonBond AG, the international leader in machine coatings technology, is collaborating with the Mars CIC to pioneer the next generation PVD coatings. This will open new markets and maintain their leading edge.

Encouraging science skills

Yorkshire Forward has come up with an £8m programme called STEM (Science, Technology, Engineering and Maths) created to encourage children of both sexes to develop engineering and science skills.

STEM brings together a wide range of organisations to promote science thinking including schools, universities, museums, businesses and the voluntary sector. Projects encompass teacher-training programmes and activities for children designed to generate a passion for science. There's also an initiative called Let's Twist, which aims to encourage more women to enter and stay in science, engineering, construction and technology jobs.

Among other initiatives, Yorkshire Forward has invested £6.5m in the first airport and aviation employment and training academy in the UK. Directions Finningley caters for budding airline and airport staff, offering niche training courses and specialised equipment. Directions Finningley is operated as a partnership between Doncaster College and North Nottinghamshire College at Robin Hood International Airport.

In its first year, Directions Finningley received over 28,000 calls from people interested in working at the airport, had 8,000 visitors enquiring about or applying for training, arranged training for 2,300 people and helped 600 people, about 80% of them locals, gain employment at the airport. It also ran recruitment exercises for 65 companies, including Thomsonfly, Ryanair and Serviceair.