



Professor John Goddard

Email; john.goddard@ncl.ac.uk

Connecting Universities to Regional Growth

Building on a strong body of academic and policy research, Professor John Goddard and his colleagues at the Centre for Urban and Regional Development Studies (CURDS) have successfully managed to build an understanding of the role and importance of universities as key players in their local socio-economic environments.

Their research has also improved the knowledge of policy makers and practitioners about the drivers and barriers to the effective mobilisation of universities for the benefit of their local areas, and more importantly, understanding how to build capacity to overcome these barriers.

“The significance of this has been to bring direct social and economic benefits to regions which are now better able to harness the potential in their universities to contribute to economic growth,” says Professor Goddard.

“Using the concepts and frameworks developed at CURDS, we have assisted the Organisation for Economic Co-operation and Development (OECD) to devise a methodology for its reviews of higher education in city and regional development.

“Participating in these reviews has led to specific impacts for the regions who in many cases enthusiastically implemented recommendations aimed at improving interactions between universities and their local socio-economic environs.

“For example, as a result of participating in the OECD review, the Värmland region of Sweden created the SLIM II project which ran during 2009 and 2010 to promote cluster development by linking universities and regional authorities to stimulate innovation in the local companies involved.

“Researchers and students were offered the opportunity to do research on real cases in companies, potentially leading to work opportunities. The university also developed shared views with the clusters on research needs which led to innovations in companies and subsequently the regional economies.”

The project greatly benefitted the Karlstad University which has become an important player in the development of the region. As a consequence, the University of Karlstad has established a Research Institute of Innovative Leadership (RIIL) independently of the project to provide research knowledge to companies in the region.

The participating companies reported an increase of 30% in sales, an increase of 50% in co-operation with the university and 35% with other companies as well as a 15% increase in employment (around 1,800 new jobs in companies in the 12

clusters). 80% of the companies in the Clusters stated that they aimed to grow and 70% believed that participation in the clusters led to new products and services.

CURDS have also had a direct impact on policy makers to help universities access European funding. Led by Professor Goddard, the team recently completed a study for the European Commission entitled 'Connecting Universities to Regional Growth – A Practical Guide' which has proved to be highly influential nationally and internationally, and has led to a greater appreciation of the role of universities in achieving 'smart growth' in Europe.

The significance of this will be changes to the design of European funding programmes to better reflect this role which in turn will result in more money available to universities to participate in regional development programmes.

For example, the Welsh Government is exploring how to adjust its approach to designing its European Funding Operational Programme to enhance the role of universities. In addition, the European Commission, as a direct result of this work on universities and regional growth, introduced a new category into its prestigious award programme 'RegioStars' called 'Connecting Universities to Regional Growth' for 2013.

Despite this being the first year for this category it has attracted thirty nine entries, more than any other award category. Participating in these awards will provide significant opportunities for these universities and their regions to promote and showcase best practice and again, reinforce the position of universities 'at the heart' of their local and regional economies.

In terms of reach, the CURDS study has been distributed widely among universities, regional and local authorities and policy makers in the European Commission with over 1,500 hard copies of the report in circulation and considerably more downloads from the DG Regio website.

The key concepts have also been disseminated at conferences and workshops, where audiences have included national and regional policy makers, senior academics and other practitioners. Since January 2011 this has included at least 40 separate events in Brazil, China, South Africa, Ireland, Netherlands, Denmark, Spain, Portugal, Austria, Finland, Sweden, Poland and Belgium.

While the change of government in 2010 and subsequent abolition of the English regional development agencies has seen a fall in demand for academic research inputs to regional economic development policy making, Professor Goddard and his team are still highly influential locally and nationally.

They have just been contracted to support the Department for Business, Innovation and Skills in developing its approach to the design and allocation of European Structural Funds for innovation activities, expected to be worth up to £6bn for the UK during 2014-2020.

In addition, Professor Goddard has recently been invited to take part in a round table discussion with the Secretary of State, Vince Cable to discuss the role of universities in local economic development.

Closer to home, Professor Goddard has been advising the North East Local Enterprise Partnership and more significantly, the high profile North East Economic Review led by Lord Adonis, on how to ensure greater social and economic impact from universities in the local economy.