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**UNIVERSITY ENGAGEMENT IN THE ECONOMY:***
**ACTIVITIES AND ATTITUDES OF NORTHUMBRIA UNIVERSITY STAFF**

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1. Context

- Government seeks greater involvement of universities with industry and wider community
- ‘Knowledge economy’ means high potential value of such activity to wider economy
- Higher Education Reach-out to Business and the Community (HEROBC) fund
- Regional development agency, ONE NorthEast, has placed universities ‘at the heart’ of its regional development strategy

2. Institutional capacity to respond

Crucial determinants of an institution’s capability in this field…

- How supportive of university involvement in external activities are staff and of the various initiatives to support it?
- Does the university’s incentive system operate in a way that encourages staff to engage in this kind of work?

3. Existing research

- Focus in existing research upon mechanisms for connecting universities with SMEs and other organisations - case studies of successful initiatives and partnerships, highlighting best practice.
- Existing research draws substantially upon perspectives of HEI senior managers - roles and perspectives of University staff themselves given less attention
- Exception - recent national survey by the Association of University Teachers (AUT) and Institute of Education, University of London
- But, comparatively small no. responses (348 nationally) and strong bias towards traditional (pre-1992) universities (and longer-serving staff) - yet new universities likely to be more active in terms of external engagements
4. Objectives of present study

- To investigate roles and views of academic and related staff regarding external activities in a new university
  - the extent and type of involvement
  - the motivations behind it, and
  - attitudes towards such activity.

- Analysis intended to assist University in (1) monitoring changes in external involvement, and (2) identifying appropriate policies of support.

5. The Survey

- Questionnaire sent (February/March 2001) to all UN academic staff (excl. School Heads and above) and researchers.

- 292 completed forms were returned; response rate 27%

- Good representation by faculty, age, gender; survey of non-respondents revealed similar in levels of external engagement and views on university role.

6. Measures of engagement: (1) numbers

- 97% of respondents involved in external activity over last 3 years, including
  - educationally-based projects
  - links with private business and commerce, and
  - government, economic development agencies etc
  - community-focused activities.

- While many of these activities involve regional partners, a substantial proportion are national or international in scope.
Table 3.1  Number of UN staff with external links (n=292)

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Activity</th>
<th>Current year</th>
<th>Previous 2 years</th>
<th>Full 3-year period</th>
<th>No activity</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>No. (%) respondents</td>
<td>279 (95%)</td>
<td>249 (85%)</td>
<td>284 (97%)</td>
<td>8 (3%)</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Table 3.2  Educationally-based external links

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Activity</th>
<th>Northumbria - current year (n=292)</th>
<th>Northumbria - previous 2 years (n=292)</th>
<th>AUT/IoE survey (n=348)</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Student work experience, placements</td>
<td>180 (62%)</td>
<td>160 (55%)</td>
<td>77 (22%)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Marketing/course promotion</td>
<td>123 (42%)</td>
<td>110 (38%)</td>
<td>97 (28%)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Links with educational institutions</td>
<td>109 (37%)</td>
<td>98 (34%)</td>
<td>97 (28%)</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Table 3.3  Commercially-based links

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Activity</th>
<th>Northumbria - current year (n=292)</th>
<th>Northumbria - previous 2 years (n=292)</th>
<th>AUT/IoE national survey (n=348)</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Consultancy</td>
<td>112 (38%)</td>
<td>116 (40%)</td>
<td>118 (34%)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Applied research</td>
<td>94 (32%)</td>
<td>84 (29%)</td>
<td>146 (42%)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>CPD/short courses</td>
<td>106 (36%)</td>
<td>100 (34%)</td>
<td>87 (25%)</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Table 3.4  Other external links

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Activity</th>
<th>UN - current year (n=292)</th>
<th>UN - previous 2 years (n=292)</th>
<th>AUT/IoE survey (n=348)</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Community relations</td>
<td>77 (26%)</td>
<td>66 (23%)</td>
<td>73 (21%)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Membership of external advisory bodies</td>
<td>72 (25%)</td>
<td>62 (21%)</td>
<td>80 (23%)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Other external activities</td>
<td>61 (21%)</td>
<td>47 (16%)</td>
<td>n/a</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
7. Measures of engagement: (2) hours per week

- More than half of staff members devote only a modest amount of time to these activities (up to one hour per day on average)
- A significant minority devote over ten hours per week on external activities
- 1-2 academic staff in every ten spends 10+ hours/week – indicating presence of a specialist group within the university

8. Initiation source

- In the majority of cases, individuals or small groups of staff initiate these activities (fully or jointly 57% of all projects identified)
- Relatively small proportion of the projects initiated at school level (37%)
- Even fewer above that level (faculty 10%, above faculty 4%)

9. Motivation and rewards (1)

- Time devoted to external activity formally recognised in workloads in only one-fifth of cases. Not recognised at all in one-third of cases
  - ‘We have no time for engagement - the School does not recognise it in terms of allocation of time’
  - ‘staff should not be expected to do external work as an extra!’
- Staff want integration of external links into formal workload - 7 out of 10 respondents would increase their engagement if activities were recognised
10. Motivation and rewards (2)

- Where activities are not (or only partially) recognised, staff receive *additional payment* in only one-third of cases. Nearly half of these considered payments inadequate for extra work involved. 71% indicated that additional payments would lead to increased activity.
  - ‘consultancy is hardly worthwhile when a large slice is taken by the Department and the work is then required to be done in one’s own time’
  - ‘Yes, I would increase activity if I was remunerated *more*. But I suffer from a lack of clarity regarding how much work I am allowed to be paid for - this grey area is a *disincentive*’

- 6 out of 10 respondents believed external activities contributed to their *career development/promotion*; 3 out of 10 believed they had no effect

- Only half of respondents reported external activities were discussed in their *annual appraisal*

11. Assessment of benefits and costs

- Respondents believed that a number of core University activities had benefited from external links

- 75% consider that teaching and learning support, professional development and advice to students positively benefited from their external involvements.
  - ‘It makes academic work become meaningful’

- Almost half considered that external activities had even had a positive benefit upon their RAE performance – with fewer than one in ten believing otherwise. In some cases

- Most felt that administrative duties suffered.
12. Perspectives on changing University role

- High level of approval among staff (90%) for University engagement in activities supporting regional economic development – over half ‘strongly agreed’
  - ‘we are part of the community and should help to encourage growth’
- 92% said University should make research, teaching and consultancy skills of staff accessible to commercial businesses.
- Respondents strongly supported (93%) view that courses should be designed with regional employers in mind; and where feasible, work experience should form a significant part of University courses.
- 7 in 10 agree that University should help to foster entrepreneurship
- Clear majority in favour of University investing core funding into commercial ventures (57% for, 26% against)
  - ‘if it was new money for that purpose, then fine. Existing money, however, is much too small for current core activities’
  - ‘I’d support the idea providing it doesn't affect the budget for other areas of University activity’
- Considerably more staff in favour of using University money to pump-prime development of business ventures by staff than against – though the balance in relation to student ventures was more even

13. Conclusions

- No authoritative national figures for comparison, but set against AUT/IoE survey findings, Northumbria staff are very extensively engaged in external activities and highly positive in their evaluation of such work.
- Staff highly supportive of notion that University should be engaged in economic development process through
  - developing appropriately-skilled graduates
  - assisting industry to improve its competitiveness, and
  - playing a role in regional development, including the fostering of entrepreneurial attitudes.
14. Policy areas

- Review incentives system and ensure it is applied evenly across the institution
- Ensure appropriate support is available - both at central services and decentralised (faculty/school) level
- Core of externally-active staff members should be seen as a resource for the development of further links and projects.
- External linkage mechanisms should seek to as effectively connect internally as they do to externally