

At your service

University education in Cornwall has received a significant injection of money and energy in recent years as part of the county's drive to use Objective One and Convergence investment to carve out its niche in the knowledge economy.

We will come on to some more involved business relationships in future issues, but I thought I would start by outlining some of the services that businesses can simply pay universities and colleges to undertake for them.

As part of their research and teaching activities, universities and colleges acquire a lot of specialised equipment and accompanying expert technical staff. When they're not being used for education, these resources have been opened up for businesses to access wherever practical.

There is potential here for businesses to get a helping hand, and to access facilities that are not available anywhere else in the region. So what kinds of things can universities and colleges help with?

The sorts of projects already undertaken in Cornwall have ranged from a technology company using electron microscopes to look for weaknesses in its microchip manufacture, through to new agrifood businesses getting advice on choosing and setting up food processing equipment.

Some services allow businesses to expand their client offering without the need for major capital investment. For example, the state-of-the-art, drive-in photography studios at Tremough could allow local photographers to stage large indoor photo shoots, while media companies can hire in extra technical kit when they land a particularly big piece of work.

Businesses in sectors as diverse as renewable energies, aerospace, marine

and surfboard manufacture have been investigating the potential of new composite materials with help from the University of Plymouth and Falmouth Marine School.

Some of this work is done with big, multinational concerns, but much of it comes from smaller, local businesses, such as a creative company having its latest designs prototyped in University College Falmouth's Design Centre.

All of this comes with a word of warning, however. Universities and colleges have to put their own core business of research and education first, so commercial work may sometimes have to

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fit in outside normal working hours. Working with a university or college is probably not going to be as straightforward as paying a regular business, indeed we are not here to compete head-to-head with the private sector, but it can mean that your business get its hands on facilities or knowhow that might otherwise be out of reach.

The range of facilities on offer is so vast and so specialised that I cannot hope to showcase it all here. The most I can do in so few words is to give a sense that universities and colleges might well already have some tools that could help your business, and to say that the door is open to start an exploratory conversation.

You may already have links with one of the universities in the county. If not, your Business Link contacts are your first port of call, or, failing that, you are very welcome to contact me to see if we can help. ▶



COMBINED UNIVERSITIES IN CORNWALL

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