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# EMPLOYER ENGAGEMENT

THE COMMONWEALTH CLUB  
LONDON WC2

13 MAY 2009

How far should universities go  
to meet the needs of employers?

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# EDITOR'S NOTE

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It is said that nothing short of a revolution in higher education is required. The Government has set a target to ensure that more than 40 per cent of the adult population is educated to degree level by 2020 - compared with 29 per cent today - and the UK's economic competitiveness is at stake. This would mean that in just 12 years, 13.1 million working-age adults will be educated to degree level - five million more than today.

Ministers have promised huge opportunities from the university sector's massive expansion, which they say could be poised to take the lion's share of a £5 billion pot available for professional development and higher-level skills training across the UK.

But these opportunities will come not through the traditional model of 18 to 21 year-olds heading off to leafy campuses, the Government says, but from degrees and higher education courses designed and co-funded by employers, provided to workers at their convenience, as their core mission, not just through courses, but research too.

The Government has called for a new generation of "business-facing" universities - and some, including the University of Hertfordshire and Thames Valley University, have already grasped the nettle and declared "employer engagement", not just through courses, but through their research, as their core mission.

But with opportunities come threats. Some argue that seizing the agenda could compromise the core mission of higher education - the pure pursuit of knowledge - and reduce teaching and learning to a narrow, utilitarian transaction. Even the Confederation of British Industry has raised doubts about a 40 per cent target, "quoted as if it were carved on tablets brought down by Moses from the mountaintop", and has warned that "businesses are not going to step up to the plate just because the public purse is too constrained and because students can't afford to pay more either". And while the debate rages, further education colleges are poised to seize the initiative with new, low-cost Bachelor of Vocational Studies degrees.

I hope this timely conference will help higher education staff and employers make the best of the opportunities available.

**Ann Mroz**  
Editor

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## WHY SHOULD YOU ATTEND?

- Hear from sector leaders and opinion formers
- Gain an insight into successful engagement through practical case studies
- Understand policy context
- Listen to the views of employers
- Network with peers

## WHO SHOULD ATTEND?

- Vice-chancellors
- Pro vice-chancellors
- Senior administrators
- Strategy directors
- Knowledge transfer directors
- Deans
- Department heads

# PROGRAMME

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09.00 Registration and coffee

09.30 Welcome and introduction from Chair  
**Ann Mroz**, Editor, *Times Higher Education*

09.35 **Keynote address**

**What are the Government's plans and how can higher education institutions compete for funding?**

**David Lammy**, Parliamentary under secretary of state for skills

09.55 **High-level skills: next steps**

**David Sweeney**, director for research, enterprise and skills, HEFCE

10.25 **Learning working**

**Derek Longhurst**, chief executive, fdf

The collaborative development of higher level work-based learning is an essential feature of employer-university partnerships. This presentation will explore the conceptual and practical challenges of the design, management and assessment of higher level learning in the workplace. It will suggest that a simplistic 'skills' discourse does not adequately represent what employers expect or want from universities.

10.55 **Valuing the views of employers**

**Richard Brown**, chief executive, CIHE

CIHE suggests that the greatest economic and social value is generated when businesses and universities work in partnership to develop skills and knowledge. The old paradigms of higher education institutions merely responding to business demands or of fundamental research leading to applications are no longer adequate.

11.25 Coffee

## ABOUT THE SPEAKERS

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**David Sweeney**, Director (Research, Innovation and Skills), HEFCE

David is responsible for developing policy on Research (including the Research Assessment Exercise and Research Excellence Framework), Business & Community and Employer Engagement. He is also responsible for the London and East regional teams and for the Strategic Development Fund.



**Derek Longhurst**, chief executive, fdf (Foundation Degree Forward)

Professor Derek Longhurst has worked in higher education for over thirty years in both the UK and USA. In 2008 Derek was elected by the Board of Trustees as a Fellow of the RSA (Manufactures and Commerce). fdf is a national body which is funded by HEFCE to support employer engagement in higher education training, including Foundation degrees.



**Richard Brown**, chief executive, The Council for Industry and Higher Education (CIHE)

CIHE is a high-level partnership between the chairs/CEOs of some of the UK's major businesses and a range of university vice-chancellors and college principals. Its mission is to advance all kinds of learning and research by fostering mutual understanding and partnerships between higher education and business.

## 11.50 How can universities help small businesses survive the recession and reposition for the upturn?

**Colin Monk**, pro vice-chancellor, University of Brighton

Peer-to-peer support among small and medium-sized enterprises is growing in popularity as an effective support system for companies, but it must be carefully implemented. ProfitNet, developed from a substantial research programme, provides a robust methodology and clear link to the resource base of universities. Attendance at monthly meetings is consistently high, with overwhelmingly positive results and feedback.

## 12.05 Engaging with business to mutual benefit

**Madeleine Atkins**, vice chancellor, Coventry University

How did Coventry University implement a business-supporting approach? What were the practical problems, the staffing implications, and what deeper issues did the agenda raise?

## 12.20 Work-based learning – the lessons so far

**Graham Henderson**, vice-chancellor, University of Teesside

The University of Teesside has evolved its approach to workforce development. It has built its market with employers and changed its culture to ensure it has the capacity and commitment to deliver a high-quality, flexible and responsive service.

**James Ramsbotham**, chief executive, North East Chamber of Commerce

In previous recessions, businesses that maintained their training and development programmes were more than twice as likely to survive and succeed in the upturn. The opportunities to attract quality employees and help them to develop will enable the best firms to grasp future opportunities. The resulting retention of committed staff will reap dividends.

## 12.50 Questions and discussion with the morning's speakers

## 13.20 Lunch



**Colin Monk**, pro vice-chancellor (Business and Marketing), University of Brighton

Colin is responsible for business services, marketing and the university's external relationships. He moved to Brighton in 2001 to focus on building and developing business and marketing. Colin led the successful funding bid and start-up of the University Centre Hastings. He is a member of the Higher Education Funding Council for England's Strategic Advisory Committee on Enterprise and Skills.



**Madeleine Atkins**, vice-chancellor, Coventry University

Having held the positions of head of department, dean and pro vice-chancellor at Newcastle University, Madeleine became vice-chancellor of Coventry University in September 2004. She is currently a member of HEFCE's new Research and Innovation Committee and is also on its Strategic Advisory Committee for Business & Community.



**Graham Henderson**, vice-chancellor, University of Teesside

Graham is responsible for the overall leadership, direction and management of the university. He was appointed vice-chancellor and chief executive in 2003, having joined the university in 1999 as deputy vice-chancellor (academic & development). Graham is also chair of the North East Higher Skills Network and a member of the National Executive.

## 14.20 Can it be mutually beneficial for universities and businesses to work together or is this just another distraction from higher education's core function?

Panel discussion chaired by Ann Mroz

**Panellists include:**

**Deian Hopkin**, vice-chancellor, London South Bank University

**Peter John**, vice-chancellor, Thames Valley University

**Roger Brown**, professor of higher education policy, Liverpool Hope University

**Mike Thorne**, vice-chancellor, Anglia Ruskin University

## 15.20 Workforce Skills for the 21st century – an employer's view

**Graham Love**, chief executive, QinetiQ and member of the CBI Higher Education Task Force

The impact of globalisation is being felt across all market sectors of the UK economy, by large and small enterprises alike in the public and private sector. For organisations to be successful in this increasingly competitive environment they must attract and retain a highly skilled workforce. From an industry perspective, universities have a vital role to play in meeting this challenge for talent.

## 15.50 Universities and businesses: a powerful partnership

**Malcolm Grant**, president and provost, University College London

The collaborations formed between universities and businesses are key to innovation in the UK, but continuing to develop and expand these links will be challenging. There are key barriers to further collaboration that must be overcome to maximise the potential opportunities. During a difficult period for the economy, these powerful partnerships continue to advance exciting new research and ideas, develop a more highly skilled workforce and enhance the nation's competitiveness.

## 16.20 Close and afternoon tea



**James Ramsbotham**, chief executive, North East Chamber of Commerce (NECC)

NECC is the champion of business in the North East and the interests of businesses throughout the region. It has almost 5,000 members and delivers a range of business support services, especially training and international trade advice. He is a deputy lieutenant for Co. Durham, chairman of the Learning and Skills Council in the North East and a director of Darlington Building Society.



**Graham Love**, chief executive, QinetiQ

QinetiQ is one of the largest defence and security companies in the world. Graham takes a strong personal interest in the promotion of science and engineering careers among young people, and is a board member of the Science, Technology, Engineering and Mathematics Network and The Sector Skills Council for Science, Engineering and Manufacturing Technologies.



**Malcolm Grant**, president and provost, University College London

Malcolm was appointed president and provost in 2003 and was previously pro vice-chancellor of Cambridge. He is chairman of the Russell Group and a member of the Higher Education Funding Council for England. Malcolm was awarded a CBE in 2003 and was appointed by the Prime Minister in 2008 as a UK Business Ambassador.

# BOOKING FORM

**Date:** Wednesday 13 May 2009

**Venue:** The Commonwealth Club, 25 Northumberland Avenue, London WC2

**Return this form to:** THE Conferences, Createvents,  
Sandy Farm Business Centre, Sandy Road, Farnham, Surrey GU10 1PX  
T: 01252 781178 F: 01252 781175 E: Clare@createvents.co.uk

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All delegates fees must be paid in advance. As it takes about month to issue and secure payment via an invoice we can only process invoices up to 13 April 2009. After this date we will either require a cheque or credit card for payment. Alternatively call 01252 781178 as it may be possible to arrange an electronic bank payment.

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**Please note:** The conference agenda is subject to change at the discretion of the organisers. For reasons beyond the control of the organisers, it may be necessary to alter the content and timing of the programme, or the identity of the speakers.