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£6MILLION FUND LAUNCHED TO MATCH UNIVERSITY RESOURCES TO REGION'S BUSINESS NEEDS

A £6 million initiative that will ensure that the resources and expertise of the higher education (HE) sector in Yorkshire and Humber help counter the impact of the economic challenges facing individuals and employers has been announced today.

Yorkshire and Humber universities and colleges have been awarded £3 million to support the region through the economic downturn by The Higher Education Funding Council for England (HEFCE). Yorkshire Forward is matching this figure targeted at supporting both businesses and individuals tap into the world class knowledge base available to them in the region.

The announcement follows a tendering process across the UK in which educational institutions had just four weeks to produce their plans to cover an eighteen month period. Yorkshire Forward and the region's universities continued to work together closely and gained five approved schemes as a result.

Successful projects, which will cover all parts of the region, include a pioneering initiative between two of the region's leading business schools at Bradford and Leeds universities. In total, the schemes are intended to support over 1,000 businesses.

The new fund will enable those who are either unemployed or under the threat of unemployment to access training, development and other support to help them continue in their current employment or find new employment. For businesses, particularly SMEs and third-sector organisations such as voluntary and charity organisations, it will provide professional knowledge and expertise to help equip them to survive the current recession.

In addition to these projects, the Department of Innovation, Universities and Skills (DIUS) has also agreed to fund a further two schemes within the region that will focus on providing internship opportunities.

Welcoming the news, Jim Farmery, Assistant Director of Business said: "We see universities as key partners in driving forward the regional economy and we already work together on a large number of exciting and innovative initiatives. It is testimony to the excellent relationship that, together, we were able to produce so quickly such powerful proposals which have resulted in dedicated funding. We believe these will bring immediate benefit to individuals and businesses as they face the very real economic challenges of today's marketplace.'

Speaking on behalf of the region's universities, Professor Bob Cryan, Vice Chancellor of the University of Huddersfield and Chair of Yorkshire Universities, said "The region's universities are committed to supporting individuals and businesses in these difficult times. While the higher education sector itself is not immune to the current economic challenges, this new funding allows us to take immediate action to assist businesses. Working closely with Yorkshire Forward we will continue to do all that we can to support the region."

Announcing the funding, Sir Alan Langlands, HEFCE's Chief Executive said, "This shows that higher education can respond swiftly to the needs of the local communities it serves. We set universities and colleges a tough task, giving them just four weeks to develop and submit their proposals, but they responded with enthusiasm and imagination, with 120 bids in total nationally to the Challenge Fund.

"Bids came in from all types of higher education institution bringing together the efforts of teaching, research and business staff across many departments in a response to evident local needs. New opportunities and courses will be on offer almost immediately, building up to a very full and busy programme over the summer and into next year."

ENDS

Notes to Editors

Yorkshire Forward

- Yorkshire Forward is the Regional Development Agency behind the economic regeneration of Yorkshire and Humber. It aims to make a positive difference by investing in jobs, improving towns and cities, and in supporting businesses throughout the region.
- In 2007/ 08, Yorkshire Forward has created and safeguarded more than 25,456 jobs, assisted 30,165 people in skills, created 1,231 businesses and attracted £1bn in investment.
- Yorkshire Forward's investment across the region is maximised by attracting European Regional Development Funding from the Objectives One and Two programmes and the 2007-2013 Regional Competitiveness and Employment Programmes.

Yorkshire Universities

Yorkshire Universities is a member organisation representing the 11 universities and 3 higher education colleges in Yorkshire & the Humber. Yorkshire Universities is the focal point for contact between the higher education institutions, the government and other regional bodies.

Higher Education generates £2.8 billion for the Yorkshire & Humber region, equivalent to 3.2% of the region's GDP. The region's HE sector supports nearly 39,000 jobs, has over 206,000 students, and produces around 55,000 graduates per year. The regional employment rate for people with at least a degree level qualification is 87.4%. The HE sector produces world-class research, expertise and resources which organisations and employers can access to develop and grow their business. The combined research power of the Universities of Leeds, Sheffield and York ranks alongside that of the Universities of Oxford and Cambridge.

Successful Projects

University of Bradford School of Management and University of Leeds Business School

The focus of the programme will be the joint provision of high-level management skills to growth orientated SMEs in the Leeds City Region. Learning and development pathways and learning and development support will be available through unaccredited and accredited executive education. Placements, consultancy and director support will also be available. The project aims to engage with at least 500 SMEs.

University of Hull

There are four key activities: professional mentoring and coaching; facilitating SME access to training opportunities; specific training on leadership, management, business start up and survival; and delivery of short courses and workshops for employers in manufacturing.

Leeds Metropolitan University with Calderdale College and Hull College

Focusing on sectors for Creative industries, Hospitality, Finance, Construction and (through collaboration with Hull College) extends to Manufacturing and Automotive. The programme will retrain or upskill individuals or prepare individuals to start their own business, primarily through courses and workshops.

Sheffield Hallam University and University of Sheffield

The proposal will target individuals, offering IAG through the 'Higher Futures' Lifelong Learning Network, retraining and reskilling through inductions to HE, short courses, bursaries and fee remission. Furthermore, there will be consultancy opportunities for companies at risk and development of entrepreneurialism through work based skills courses. Over 1000 separate interventions are planned.

University of York, York St John University, Askham Bryan College, Craven College, York College (together with City of York Council)

The 'Higher York' Lifelong Learning Network will deliver a programme of activities for businesses and individuals. Businesses will be able to take advantage of specific support to address recession related problems, such as business planning, CPD and training for staff, and access to consultancy support.

Individuals will be offered career counselling, enterprise support and work-based learning including placements.

Internships

In addition to the above two internship schemes have been funded by DIUS, one of which will operate through the university of Leeds and the other, involving all of the universities and HEI's, through the Careers advisory services, again coordinated by the university of Leeds.