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***Gloucestershire College and University work together to boost local economy***

The benefits of generating closer ties with local companies were highlighted by University of Gloucestershire vice-chancellor Patricia Broadfoot and Gloucestershire College (GC) principal Greg Smith at the recent Gloucestershire First meeting.

Mr Smith said that, in changing from a community to a vocational college, it had developed productive relationships with local schools and the University in an effort to provide what the Gloucestershire economy needs.

“We have over 250 14-16 year olds studying vocational courses at GC and some 90 per cent progress to further education,” said Mr Smith, “which means that pupils in 16 schools across the county already access our courses at Levels 1 and 2.”

The principal reported a real desire among many young people for higher-level skills. “Many courses, for plasterers and those interested in motor vehicle maintenance, for example, are oversubscribed and we have over 700 apprentices in training.”

Mr Smith pointed out that closer involvement with the University was the result of a new vision to provide employer-focused vocational study in further and higher education – with new foundation degrees including electronic engineering, computing, health and social care and a £6 million vocational centre in Tewkesbury in the pipeline.

This year the University will launch Project Nexus/@Gloucestershire - a new project that more closely aligns much of the University’s work with that required by the local economy.

Prof Broadfoot told members of Gloucestershire First that, since 2002, the University had recorded a 14-fold increase in employer-engagement revenue and had developed significant provision with local and national employers.

“Project Nexus is the working title for a new facet of University activity that will create a demand-led, commercially-focussed organisation to deliver performance-improvement programmes for Gloucestershire businesses,” she said.

Led by the University, it will concentrate on three key areas: enterprise – developing a culture of enterprise for students, business and university staff; innovation – enabling business to flourish in a rapidly-changing economy through partnership with university expertise, and skills – developing individuals through an employer-led programme of higher-level skills support.

Prof Broadfoot said that there was more emphasis on producing the right skills in the right business sectors to increase university productivity as young people progressed through school to further or higher education.

“We need to encourage individuals and employers to invest in their futures, improve management and leadership skills, be innovative and creative.

“Higher education will become more aligned to employer need to meet the requirements of the economy through more robust engagement with employers and business leaders.

“We will pioneer the introduction of local, co-funded courses, with some costs met by employers, and we are keen to work with employers to make the best of these opportunities,” added Prof Broadfoot.

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