

# KnowledgeExchange

A quarterly publication from WestFocus

Issue Six Spring 2007



## AGAINST THE ODDS

A deaf student's revolutionary plan to help others like her



*Azra Akhtar accepting her award from Charles Osmond, Co-founder of Freshminds, research and consultancy business*

A partially deaf woman has invented an interactive CD-Rom which could revolutionise the way thousands of people in her position approach further education.

Azra Akhtar struggled academically because there was little help in mainstream education for people like her who are partially deaf. Azra encountered many barriers through the course of her secondary and further education journey. These included having no or limited access to technical aids such as hearing or audio aids, human support (note-takers) and British Sign Language resources. Despite these difficulties, she has achieved a BA in Education Studies with Applied Computing & Information Systems from Roehampton University and is now studying for a PHD at the same university.

Azra has invented a CD-Rom which she believes will help other deaf people to cope better with their studies and open up new opportunities for some who would otherwise be left behind.

Her innovative product is called "Signed Accountancy" and uses five different stimuli to encourage better learning and provide maximum access. Audio, sign, caption, colour and graphics including animation are

used to give deaf people a clearer picture and understanding of the subject matter. The idea is targeted at students who have passed GCSE stage and is being looked at by a number of further education colleges. Azra hopes to negotiate a licensing agreement with them to bring her CD-Rom into the market. Azra's project won her the WestFocus Bright Ideas students' competition last year and she will be setting up her own consultancy called Deafinitions to help develop learning aids for all ages of deaf students.

"The results I achieved at school were not a true reflection of my learning potential," says Azra. "deaf learners, like other learners want to achieve academic success but due to lack of specialist signed interactive resources their education suffers. This has a profound impact on their educational achievements and ultimately affects career choices. This translates into a lack of equal opportunities. With my CD-Rom, I want to make a difference to a deaf learner's life and to see someone achieve. This is far more rewarding than any financial gains." Azra has been offered a three-month free incubation space at Roehampton University, where she studies. This will allow her to develop the idea with access to IT and space in which to work, with no overheads. "I couldn't have done this without the involvement of Roehampton University Enterprise Office which offers not only information about competitions and awards but also business advice and support, mentoring and referrals to organisations that can help develop an idea," she says. Winning the Bright Ideas competition was a real breakthrough for Azra who says it allowed her to bring her invention into the public domain. "Winning gives you an incentive to carry on. You suddenly realise that your idea is sellable and has a 'wow' factor. I would recommend all students to take part in the competition as you have to start somewhere and Bright Ideas is a great platform to promote your product."

## Environmental products get recognition in the world's press



'Eco Annie' wools is starting to gain attention from the world's press. Annie Sherburne, who is currently studying for an MA in Sustainable Futures through the Sustainable Design Research Centre at Kingston University has been helped through the WestFocus Sustainability in Practice Network. She has recently been featured in a full-page interview in The Independent newspaper, <http://news.independent.co.uk/environment/article2144573.ece>. She has also been interviewed about eco textiles on the breakfast programme of the BBC's World Service to coincide with the United Nations' Intergovernmental Panel on Climate Change conference findings about global warming in Paris. The BBC was keen to hear from people in the UK who are having an influence on environmental change and Annie's range of eco-wools, made from 50% recycled, 50% pure new wool, are a perfect example of how design and innovation can have an impact on 21st century style production methods. Annie Sherburne has a dedicated shop for her products in the Oxo Tower, London. [www.anniesherburne.co.uk](http://www.anniesherburne.co.uk).

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## Executive interview: Chris Lloyd WestFocus Executive Director Chris Lloyd looks to the future



Chris Lloyd at home

WestFocus has entered a new phase but the ongoing co-operation between the institutions through the Knowledge and Business Development Networks, Business Creation support and the Centre for Knowledge Exchange continues to provide an excellent resource to Roehampton in its development of Enterprise activities.

I am Chair of the WestFocus Executive Committee this year and consider the work we are engaged in as a Consortium to be essential to the development of Enterprise at Roehampton. The opportunity provided by WestFocus to tap into the expertise and experience of the other universities is very valuable and enriching for all members. The collaboration also gives us extra strength in bids for further funding and I hope that we will capitalise on this during the HEIF 3 funding period.

The Centre for Knowledge Exchange is also an extremely valuable resource and we have been particularly impressed with the support it has provided to Roehampton in the development of Entrepreneurship activities for students and staff. Roehampton continues to lead the Social Inclusion Network and we are anxious to carry on the excellent work done by the Network in HEIF 2 round of funding and to move it forward to focus more on income generation so that it becomes self sustaining and can continue to operate as a network in the future irrespective of Government funding streams.

Enterprise at Roehampton is developing well through the Schools of the University supported by the Enterprise Team which also includes the international and EU Bids Co-ordination for the University. We are leading on two of the five UK-led Erasmus Mundus bids now, the initiative that promotes the European Union as a centre of excellence in learning around the world. I have found working within the WestFocus Consortium to be very a useful and developmental experience and am certain that it will continue to be an important collaboration in the future.

## Inspirational Club Is The Most Successful Society At Royal Holloway

A student-led club for budding entrepreneurs is now the most popular registered society at Royal Holloway since it recruited 300 members during Freshers' week.

In a break from tradition students now appear to be more interested in becoming successful in business than indulging in socialising and hobby-based pursuits. INSPIRE, the Royal Holloway club, was founded in 2005 by students returning from a week-long residential course called Enterprisers at Roehampton University. The club was the brain child of Maria Mateeva, a management student who became the first President. She got the idea after attending an event organised by CMI and WestFocus.

This year the reins have been taken over by Jenny Harmer, a third year English language student and a new committee was formed from students who attended the Bright Futures event, a WestFocus residential course held at Royal Holloway in September. It is now the largest registered society within College. The club runs events in the first two terms to encourage students to participate in WestFocus Entrepreneurship Centre activities and to introduce Enterprise to non-management students. During 2007 INSPIRE is becoming more closely associated with the Royal Holloway Management Society and a number of joint events are planned. If you are interested in participating in the club you should contact:

David Saunders, d.saunders@rhul.ac.uk



Jenny Harmer, Matthew Beckford and Monica Alvarez at the INSPIRE stand at Freshers'

## Businesses benefit from Student Placement Scheme

Businesses are being offered the chance to hire a high-calibre student or graduate for just £7.50 an hour on short term placement schemes.



The University Talent Projects (UTP) give students valuable experience in the workplace and offers businesses access to some of the brightest minds around. The UTP finds an appropriate student for all types of companies from within the seven WestFocus Universities to undertake a specific project. University Talent business advisers assess a company's needs and match them to a student.

The scheme offers a low cost, low risk solution to gaps in the skill market. Numerous projects are being undertaken by UTP including finding students to help devise marketing plans, set up websites and conduct market surveys. Typically courses last for around eight weeks but this is flexible and many organisations choose to retain the student or graduate on a long term basis. So not only does the student get quality work experience but also a chance to impress in the marketplace.

The projects can be run on a full or part-time basis but current students are able to work for up to fourteen hours a week. The projects have been a great success. One example was Harrow In Business (HIB), a service organisation, which was commissioned to carry out a major survey of business in Harrow. Devang Chouhan, an MSc student in Business Computing at the University of Westminster was selected to lead a team of twenty eight students from Brunel, Westminster and Kingston working in shifts to collate data on five thousand businesses.

"The experience of working on such a big project has been incredible," says Devang. "It's been great to put into practice all the things I learned during my degree," he added.

Anne-Marie Mulgrew, of Harrow In Business, said, "There was a huge amount of work due to the sheer volume of data we had to cover. Devang and his team worked incredibly hard. He devised most of the systems we are now using. In the first two weeks I was very hands on but later I was able to leave Devang and his team to get on with it and they did a great job."

For more information, or to discuss your requirements please contact [University-talent@westfocus.org.uk](mailto:University-talent@westfocus.org.uk) or visit [www.university-talent.org.uk](http://www.university-talent.org.uk) or phone 020 8547 8294.

## Ingrid Stafford is the New Business Advisor for University Talent.

Here are her views on the job.

"It's great to be given the opportunity to represent the 7 universities in the WestFocus Consortium, I feel that SMEs have a great deal to benefit by tapping into the talent that's available to them in universities and it's my job to spread the word! SMEs can use students or graduates for specific projects, which will help to grow and develop their business, whether that is creating a website, database, marketing campaign or something which is more strategic such as product or service development or research. Students can bring a fresh approach to a problem and can come up with innovative solutions. It is also a low risk investment as the wage can be as little as £180 per week, to bring in an employee of the same calibre would be much more expensive! There are various schemes available to businesses including flexible projects during term time (UTP and Flexi STEP) and summer placement schemes (ShellSTEP). We will advertise your vacancies free on our website and help with the recruitment and selection process. I would welcome the chance to come and talk to you about your business needs and see how I can help you make the most of what University Talent has to offer.



### My Background

Business graduate from Kingston University, I studied whilst working fulltime for 4 years, within Kingston University Careers Service. As Careers Information Manager, I provided a service for students and graduates, and businesses. Amongst other things I organised the 'Employers on Campus' careers events and helped launch the JobShop. Prior to this I worked for 5 years in Business Development, working with SMEs and large companies in the field of advertising and logistics.

## INVENTOR AND INVESTOR: A MARRIAGE MADE IN HEAVEN OR HELL?

Every so often someone somewhere comes up with a brilliant idea that will make them a millionaire. The trouble is that getting the idea off the drawing board and into the market needs investment. Inventors are naturally distrusting of investors who they see as exploitative and greedy. Investors want to make money from an idea and see inventors as a vehicle for their own success. The two are uncomfortable but necessary bed-fellows. **Francis Hobbs**, Business Creation Director at Kingston University explores the inventor/investor conundrum;

"Having developed my own product from a blank sheet of paper to market entry I am, more than many, conscious of the complexities of developing a business based on a novel product. I have also not only watched but felt the frustration of others trying to tread the same path. It can be a lonely journey with many apparently insurmountable problems. Developing new ideas is difficult. Every idea requires a range of skills and normally involves several people. However, stereotypical convention suggests there are only two major players: an inventor and a 'greedy' investor. The two are polar opposites in this engagement. Each needs the other but retains mistrust which is directly proportional to the perceived personal investment by the inventor and the direct financial input from the investor. I've seen too many good, commercial opportunities fail to get to market simply because this relationship could not be managed effectively.

The problem is that inventors and investors see the world from completely different angles. An investor focuses on making a profit and sees the idea as a way of generating money while an inventor sees the idea itself as being wealth. There are people who invent things and succeed commercially on their own but they are few and far between. James Dyson, who designed the Dyson Vacuum cleaner, is one and could be called an inventor entrepreneur. Trevor Bayliss, on the other hand, designed the wind-up radio but needed a third party to develop his business. Because of this he has always said he has not been rewarded as well as he should have been.

My recent work in helping develop business at Kingston University has focussed my attention on the relationship between inventor and investor. How can we create a climate for product development that releases the skills of all involved based on positive engagement rather than fear and mistrust?

At Kingston there are business support teams who have skills in helping people obtain grants from a variety of sources ranging from government funds to private investors. There are significant technical skills available which can help develop the product or service without the need to find external funds and advice is on hand for inventors who have no alternative but to go cap in hand to an investor."

*Adapted from Industry and Higher Education Magazine.*



John Halliday and Frances Hobbs (right) from Business Creation at Kingston University

## Failure Is the Secret Of Success

If you want to become a successful entrepreneur you must be prepared to fail sometimes. That's the philosophy of WestFocus's visiting entrepreneur Christopher Fogg.

According to Christopher, who is a driving force behind the newly-opened London Innovation Centre, the ability to cope with failure separates an entrepreneur from other business people. During his 40 year career Christopher has been involved in numerous business start-ups some of which have gone to be a huge success but many others have failed. "It's the ability to take risks and go for every opportunity that presents itself that defines an entrepreneur," he says.



Christopher Fogg, WestFocus's visiting entrepreneur

At the end of January dozens of former Kingston students took part in the first two-day entrepreneurship training course organised by the newly-formed Enterprising Graduates Network. The Network is a WestFocus initiative that is being piloted at Kingston to encourage more graduates to start their own businesses. If it's successful it will be rolled out to all 7 WestFocus Universities.

Participants had very different reasons for attending the course. Some, like Sam Weerasinghe, a Business Management alumnus and an Arts development manager in a large publicly funded organisation, wanted to explore her business ideas and 'do something new'. She felt that it was the right time in her life to go it on her own.

James Mires, a mechanical engineer by training, already runs his own property trading business but wants to branch out into the holiday industry.

Prudence Williams, an MA-holder in Strategic Financial Management, has been thinking about starting her own business for a year. She realised that 9 to 5 job was not for her but wasn't quite sure what she wanted to do. She was therefore looking to get a better understanding of business processes and to build up her confidence.

Martha Mador, the course Director said, "We were delighted to meet so many enthusiastic and enterprising graduates. The University has many varied resources to offer and we are looking forward to working with the graduates as they develop new enterprises and grow existing ones."

After two days of intensive training to develop graduates' presentation and negotiation skills the organisers were delighted to see that the tips on networking had already taken effect as the majority of the group headed for a pub to continue talking over ideas in a less formal environment.



## How Do You Communicate With Business? Check Out The Knowledge Exchange

All seven WestFocus Universities were represented at the first Knowledge Exchange Fellows Programme in January to discuss innovation, entrepreneurship and starting a business.

Staff and professors met in the Boardroom at the University of Westminster to share ideas before being challenged to present an "elevator pitch" selling a new product or service to a panel of judges. The delegates were divided into teams of four and had two minutes to convince the judges their idea was the best. The winners came up with a "green" scheme to mark out multi-surface sports pitches with self-dissolving lines from an aerosol can.

The three day programme began with discussions about the SME marketplace, value propositions and university-based consultancy. Delegates went on to evaluate business opportunities, how to get funding and venture capital, and the vagaries of understanding intellectual property and patents. Many of the sessions were held by external presenters, who bring additional valuable expertise into WestFocus activities. On the last day delegates looked at specific WestFocus Knowledge Exchange expertise in student/graduate employability, marketing and IT, as well as leadership.

The final sessions in the afternoon were spent playing entrepreneurial learning games. Some of them are developed by WestFocus and are available for sale. E-Trader, the first in the Apprentice Entrepreneur series, was demonstrated, along with an early test version of the second game - DJ Life. The highly successful programme was concluded by Stephen Whaley (WestFocus Executive Director) who presented the award of the 'Fellow's Certificate' to those qualifying delegates who had attended. The Knowledge Exchange programme is an example of how both universities and businesses can benefit from closer interaction.

The Lambert Review, carried out in 2003 pointed out that "Universities are potentially very attractive partners for business. University researchers operate in international networks and they know where the cutting edge work in their field is going on around the world. Unlike corporate or publicly owned research facilities university labs see a constant throughput of new researchers in the form of students, postgraduates and teachers."

Another benefit of cooperation with the business sector is that universities can increase their funding by providing consultancy, getting involved in collaborative projects and selling intellectual property. However more needs to be done to forge closer relationships with both parties having a better understanding of how the other functions. That's where WestFocus comes in; it put together a Knowledge Exchange Programme for those academics who are interested in linking up with business.

Martha Mador, the Programme's Director and Project manager of the WestFocus Entrepreneurship Centre says, "The Knowledge Exchange Fellows Programme is building a network of capable professionals. The aim is to diversify and improve our interactions with enterprise of all sorts, which in turn inform our teaching and our research."

Digby Ingle of Thames Valley University said that the Knowledge Exchange Fellows course "was a well conceived and put together programme that provided excellent opportunities to network."

Laura Scott of Kingston University said, "Very good interaction was encouraged between attendees."



Academics enjoy group discussion at the WestFocus Fellows programme

## Bid Won For KnowledgeLondon

The London Development Agency has announced that WestFocus and KnowledgeEast, two London-based Knowledge Exchanges encompassing 15 Universities, have won their joint bid to run London's network for knowledge transfer. The network will operate under the new name, **KnowledgeLondon**, to facilitate the exchange of ideas and good practice between professionals working in the capital's higher and further education sectors. **KnowledgeLondon** will run a series of general interest events and will provide a forum and a contact point for all interested parties. The new network will be launched in central London on the 27th of March.



## New Games Make Entrepreneurship Child's Play

Enterprising students can now practice their business skills with two learning games developed by the WestFocus Knowledge Exchange.

MarketPlace is a board game based on a real-life online restaurant reservation business and represents a new and exciting way of teaching negotiation skills at all levels. The board game focuses on key marketing concepts: features, benefits, needs and objectives. Participants are divided into 2 groups. One group are the 'sellers' and the other group are the 'purchasers'. The sellers then make their pitch, elicit needs and encounter objections from the purchasers. It usually takes around 30 to 45 minutes to play. Marketplace has already been piloted successfully on intensive programmes and on curriculum modules for developing entrepreneurial skills. The game is very versatile and can be used in a variety of learning situations including entrepreneurship courses, marketing courses and professional development programmes.

E-trader is a PC-based game, the first in the 'Apprentice Entrepreneur' series of computer games under development by WestFocus, which simulate the setting up of a new business.

The player has to establish and run an internet-based business which involves creating and capturing demand, buying, holding and distributing stock, and taking decisions relating to managing working capital. The game incorporates a self-assessment tool used to assess the player's entrepreneurial qualities. Additionally, an elevator pitch and a business plan can be captured and printed by the player as part of a learning portfolio. The game can be incorporated into academic modules, or act as a standalone learning vehicle. It covers approximately 10 hours of learning time which represents 6 months of trading.

The next CD-Rom in the series – DJ Life – covering running a DJ business, will become available in April 2007. Both Marketplace and E-Trader can be purchased now from WestFocus.

For further information or to place an order please contact

**Dr Martha Mador** on **020 8547 8604** or by email **M.Mador@kingston.ac.uk**

You can also write to Dr Mador at:

WestFocus Entrepreneurship Centre

c/o Kingston University, 53-57 High Street, Kingston upon Thames KT1 1LQ



## Calendar of events

### European Funding for Life Sciences:

#### FP7 Explained

20 February, 1pm-5pm

Reading University

### The Entrepreneurship Experience

22 February, 8 March, 6.30pm-8.30pm

Kingston University

### Kingston Enterprising Graduates

#### Network Meeting

22 February, 29 March, 4.30pm-6pm

Kingston University

### Masterclass:

#### Valuing Life Sciences Technology

28 February, 10am-4.30pm

Reading University

### NCGE – Flying Start Rally

6 March, 12am-6pm

Brighton Dome, Brighton

### Counter-Current

#### Chromatography Workshop

6 – 8 March, 9.30am-6pm

Brunel University

### Finance and Law for Non-profit Organisations

7 March, 9.30am-5pm

Brunel University

### Preparing to Become a Community Interest Group

27 March, 9.30am-5pm

Brunel University

### BioTrinity

28 March, 9am-6pm

Reading University

### Transoesophageal Echocardiography

29-30 March, 9am-6pm

St George's, University of London

## Other Events of interest.

### LCACE's inaugural conference, The Art of Partnership

19 March

The Unicorn Theatre, Southwark, London

[www.lcace.org.uk/events/?event=44](http://www.lcace.org.uk/events/?event=44)

### The Role of Higher Education in the Regions

23 March, 9am-4.30pm

Barbican Centre, London

[www.neilstewartassociates.com/jb225](http://www.neilstewartassociates.com/jb225)

For more information about these and other events please go to [www.westfocus.org.uk](http://www.westfocus.org.uk)

Should you have any comments or suggestions or have a story to tell please contact Nadia Zernina, the Editor, at [nadia.zernina@brunel.ac.uk](mailto:nadia.zernina@brunel.ac.uk)

### WestFocus members:

